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WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"ALICE WENTWORTH,"

"THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL,"

&c., &c.

"But yet the cause and root of all his ill,
Inward corruption, and infected sin,
Not purged nor heal'd, in him remained still."
SPENSER'S FAERIE QUEEN,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL.

CHAPTER I.

HAVING merely caught the word "Langton" from the footman, and therefore only expecting to meet a stranger, in the person of the new mistress of the Moat, Katherine's astonishment at the sight of Cecilia was excessive; and her surprise was accompanied by a degree of agitation, which, for a moment, threatened a return of the violent emotion that had seized her on her first arrival at home. She did not however give way this time; but the crimson flush, which rose in her cheeks as she first perceived Miss Langton, was as suddenly exchanged for deadly paleness, she trembled from head to foot while receiving her embrace, and was still too breathless to have been able to utter a single word, when she had to move onwards to be introduced to Mrs. Spencer Langton. With her, in her quality of new acquaintance, Mr. and Mrs. Oakly were a great deal too much occupied to notice anything peculiar in Katherine's greeting of

Cecilia, who, on her part, though considerably struck, not to say amazed, at what was so unusual in her young friend's demeanour, was hindered from farther observation of it, by the necessity of responding to Annie's expressions of overflowing delight at seeing her, and to Lewis Markham's inquiries about *her* father, *his* uncle and aunt, and the Shadworth neighbourhood in general. Katherine, meanwhile, found in Mrs. Spencer Langton a young and pretty-looking woman, who seemed resolved to be pleased with her, and also resolved to make *herself* pleasing. She was equally determined, as Katherine soon discovered, upon another thing; namely, upon "carrying her off," that very afternoon, to the Moat, "that she might give Cecilia the treat of her society for the three days she was to be at her brother's, and tell her all her Paris stories while they were fresh. Now it was precisely "while they were fresh" that Katherine felt so insecure of being able to generalize them sufficiently to shun suspicion. She hoped to achieve this better at a later period; but, at present, the opportunity for long "tête-à-têtes" which, under other circumstances, would have been irresistible, was, at all risks, to be avoided. To refuse was disagreeable—embarrassing; but the less so as Cecilia was out of hearing; and, summoning up all her courage, Miss Desborough declined the invitation, with many thanks, on the plea of being "so newly arrived at home that she had not half told her

stories to her mother and sister, yet." The plea was a fair one; and such as so new an acquaintance as Mrs. Spencer Langton could hardly have combated, had not Mrs. Oakly, though with an indescribably worried and anxious look, repeated once or twice "that she would spare Kate willingly, for the sake of such a pleasure as a visit at the Moat with Cecilia there."

Thus encouraged, the lady began again to urge her request, dwelling much on "the charity it was to *her*, when any cheerful, agreeable person would keep her company in that rambling old house she was just getting accustomed to; it was so ghostified! It was really an act of humanity to enliven her with some little accounts of what was going on, now that she was so much out of the way of all her old friends."

The habit of egotism, and an absolute lack of logical combination, had brought Mrs. Spencer Langton to shift the ground of the favour she was petitioning for, from her sister-in-law to herself; and she was not immediately ready with a fresh means of adjuration, when Miss Desborough answered, with considerable presence of mind:

"Oh, it is very good of you to say so; and, some day or other, if it suits you, I shall be most happy to keep you company at the Moat; but, as you dislike so much being alone, it will be better that I should be left in reserve till after you have lost Cecilia."

"Mrs. Langton does lose Cecilia in three days' time, I understand," observed Mrs. Oakly, taking courage, during the pause that followed Kate's speech, to make an attempt for getting her away from Wyngate and from Lewis Markham, if not immediately, yet soon enough to prevent her uncle Herbert from making remarks on the perilous propinquity. She was assisted to her heart's content by her visitor, who was not slow to make full use of her evident approbation of the plan.

"I was wrong," said she, "to propose Miss Desborough's going with us this afternoon; that *would* be taking her away too soon; but if she could come on Tuesday, when she *has* had time to look about her here a little, it would be such a kindness! for Cecilia must go home then. I shall be perfectly alone, and really . . . ." Here she stopped a moment, and, addressing Katherine, added, "that she was sensible the Moat had few attractions; and that she was, perhaps, very cool in inviting one who was fresh from Paris to so dull a place, where she had nothing but her own and her husband's society to offer; but she had heard so much of Miss Desborough's good nature, that she was emboldened to ask her," etc.

"Kate says she's so charmed with everything that is quiet and countryfied, from its contrast to Paris," said Mrs. Oakly; "and I see nothing to prevent her going over to the Moat on Tuesday. You can see nothing yourself, I am sure, my dear?" continued she, in a manner which rendered

it next to impossible for her daughter to give any other reply than—

"No, mamma, not if you don't," uttered in a rather melancholy tone, which was either unperceived or unheeded by Mrs. Langton, who overwhelmed her with thanks, and compliments upon her good-nature.

The thing being thus settled, as it were in a moment (though quite irrespectively of the inclinations of the party chiefly concerned), Mrs. Oakly breathed more freely; and she inwardly determined that it should not be her fault if her daughter did not sojourn a trifle longer at the Moat than Lewis Markham at Wyngate. Meantime, the rapid flow of Mrs. Langton's speech had turned from gratitude to "dear Miss Desborough" into admiration of a brilliant cactus in full flower, at that moment ornamenting the conservatory into which the apartment opened; and, in an instant more, Mr. and Mrs. Oakly, with their guest, had all three adjourned thither to take a nearer view of its beauties, while Katherine, hardly able to master her vexation, remained behind.

"And I must tell Cecilia this—tell it her this moment, too!" thought she, as Miss Langton, leaving the table where she and Annie had been looking over prints with Lewis Markham, crossed the room to join her. "Cecy," said she, abruptly, "what do you think I have been doing? I have refused to go back to the Moat with you and your sister-in-law, because I have been only two days

at home; and then—you will hardly believe it—when I had said 'no' to *that*, I was asked again—asked for Tuesday next—and mamma is in such a wonderful hurry to get rid of me, I suppose, that she 'sees no objection!' I mean to get off if I can; but in case I can't, you must not be offended with me, dear Cecy! For, indeed," continued she, eagerly, "indeed I did it for the best!"

"I hope, my dear child," said Miss Langton, kindly, "that I shall never be so touchy as to be offended with what is done 'for the best.' I am sorry the thing can't be, but not disappointed; for, in truth, I think the invitation was both unreasonable and unseasonable, and I honestly believe, though Alicia would hardly thank me for telling you so, that you do well to let your family see you don't desire a life of constant change, and wandering from one visit to another."

Katherine, annoyed at being thus praised by implication for a sort of self-denial she had not exerted, very nearly exclaimed, "Oh, Cecilia, it was not on account of those good reasons I refused to go back to the Moat with you!" But she swallowed the words that rose to her lip, and said, with difficulty:

"I am glad you think me right, for I could not bear *you* to think me unkind! And I suppose," added she, more easily, "that I ought not to feel so hurt, as I confess I did, at mamma's readiness to send me away the moment I came home; for I conclude," proceeded she, lowering her voice to a

whisper, while her eye travelled to the other end of the room, "I conclude that it is the old story! Though one would think, after I had been away so long, and been seeing so many other people too, that I might be in the house with a connection of the family, without danger to my peace. But I am happier, now that I have told you, Cecy, and that I know you will not be hurt, even if I have to go on Tuesday!"

"You may make your mind easy on that point, my dear, and I expect we shall be able to make ourselves amends later; for I hope, after Mrs. Tynedale's return from Buxton, to pay her a longer visit than I did in the spring, and perhaps contrive to come here as well. I feel, too, that if you *are* to go to the Moat, it is perhaps better you and Alicia should make acquaintance, without the presence of one who is too intimate with both parties, to be indifferent to . . . But I must say Alicia is a good deal improved; and, besides that, having at last discovered what can and cannot be managed in a small establishment, her household no longer exhibits that struggle between show and economy, which used to make it so uncomfortable; I shall be glad if you can like her, and really she is much more of a companion than you could expect from seeing her in this way. And now, Kate, to change the subject, can you enlighten me at all respecting my brother Oswald's plans and their various alterations? I know you saw him frequently at

the Carews'; did you ever hear him speak of an intention to return to England?"

"I did," replied Katherine, coloring as suddenly and as deeply as at the first sight of Cecilia, and then continuing, in a tone which she attempted to render indifferent, but which, to the ear of one who had known her from childhood, betrayed considerable embarrassment, "I did once or twice; but I hardly think he was expressing more than a momentary fancy; I can't be sure that he ever meant it really."

Why should Kate find it so difficult to answer such an ordinary question about Oswald? Why should she have been so agitated before? Why was it that her manner, though as affectionate as ever, was yet, every now and then, constrained? These thoughts passed rapidly through Cecilia's mind; but without seeming to notice anything, she observed, quietly, "that she supposed it *must* have been only a momentary fancy, though, from some expressions of his, she herself had thought more of it, and had therefore been a good deal disappointed by a letter she had received that morning, which spoke of remaining on the Continent six months at least."

"Then whatever his object was, I shall see no more of him!" considered Katherine, who instantly derived so much comfort from the intelligence, that she was able to listen quite composedly to Cecilia's hopes "that since Oswald was not

coming home, he might at least fill up the time with travelling, whether in Switzerland or Germany, instead of lingering on where he was."

Lewis Markham and Annie had now, in imitation of the others, passed first into the conservatory, and thence into the garden, where Mrs. Spencer Langton's ecstasy at the beauty and perfection of all around her (which to some ears might have sounded affected), was too flattering to Mr. Oakly to be displeasing to him.

"I suppose we ought to join them," said Katherine, looking out.

But as they reached the glass door, Cecilia detained her a moment to say:

"I believe I ought to tell you, Kate, in justice to everyone, as you *may* be a great deal alone with Alicia, and she is a great talker, that you must take all she says about Oswald with considerable grains of allowance; for an unlucky, and perhaps not well-judged speech of his about 'never wishing to spend another day with Spencer and his wife,' was once indiscreetly repeated to her, and I am afraid she will never forgive or forget it."

"I shall make all due allowance, you may be certain," replied Katherine, rather stiffly, though inwardly rejoiced at hearing Lewis Markham's story confirmed; as it satisfied her that, even in times to come, and supposing the gentleman *should* see fit to revisit his own country, no intercourse with the inhabitants of the Moat would ever bring her into contact with him.

The friends now joined the party on the lawn, where all wandered about together, till Miss Langton thought it necessary to remind her sister-in-law that it was a drive of several miles home, and that Mrs. Lancefield's carriage, etc., must not be kept out too long. Upon this observation, Mrs. Spencer Langton "tore herself away," as she expressed it, from all the "kind friends and lovely things it was such a treat to her to have a peep at," and, hastening into the barouche, told Katherine "that she should look out for her on Tuesday." Cecilia followed her as soon as she had bid her own adieus to Katherine and to Mrs. Oakly, who, as the carriage drove off, seemed then first to become aware that Annie had been "idling about the whole afternoon, when she should have been in the school-room;" to which seat of learning she despatched her without delay, while she herself, with her usual languid step, sought her own apartment "to have a little rest" after her fatigues.

Entire rest, Mrs. Oakly was, however, not destined to enjoy; for Katherine, determined not to go to the Moat without some struggle against it, followed her mother to her dressing-room, where she briefly—perhaps rather bluntly—laid before her her utter dislike to visiting Mrs. Langton, or anyone else, so immediately on her return home. Now Mrs. Oakly was generally liable to be overpowered—hurried into submission—when surprised by an unexpected attack of any kind; but, on this

occasion, her defensive armour was in readiness, and she replied, with little or no hesitation, "that she was sorry, too, to have to part with Katherine again so soon, only it was so desirable—would be so convenient—that she should be absent from home next week, on account of the Hazlewoods."

"On account of the Hazlewoods, mamma!" exclaimed Katherine. "What have they to do with my going or staying?"

"My dear," replied Mrs. Oakly, "you have never thought of a great deal that we have to consider with regard to them; they are old friends, old neighbours, excellent people, whom I wouldn't hurt or neglect for the world!"

"No, mamma, of course not; but still I don't understand . . . . "

"Well, Kate, since it doesn't occur to you of itself, I must explain to you, that I feel bound to call on Mrs. Hazlewood the first day I can next week (if it were only to congratulate on Louisa's marriage, that would be necessary, you know), and you being away, it will be quite easy and natural (without any too apparent consciousness of what has happened so vexatiously) to take Annie with me, mentioning where you are. Without that I hardly know if I could go through it! At best it makes me dreadfully nervous! And then, too, there is Mr. Waterfield with them; we ought to ask him and them to dinner; it will be painful, very; but it must be done, and your being away at the Moat makes it all so much more bearable to

me, that I must really request—I don't quite like to insist upon it, Kate—but I *do* think you might spare me something of the awkwardness, by going to the Langtons', as I have been reckoning upon, with some little comfort, for the last half hour! And then, too, your uncle Herbert—I have heard from him to-day—he and your aunt will be here on Monday week, and you know they always expect us to have the Whitmores to meet them; so, with Lewis Markham in the house, your room will be such a convenience!"

"Yes, I see I must go," replied Katherine, in a tone which was rather sullen than resigned; and she left her mother's room, too angry to venture on saying more.

The mention of uncle Herbert shewed her, as plainly as if it had been pronounced in words, that it *was* on account of Lewis Markham, and *not* on account of the Hazlewoods, that she was being sent away; while it also shewed her, that unless she was prepared to go through something very like a quarrel with her mother on the subject (and thereby increase her suspicions), farther resistance was in vain.

CHAPTER II.

"WHAT lovely flower-beds these are," said Lewis Markham to Katherine, next morning, as she sauntered about the flower-garden, ready dressed for Church, waiting till the rest of the party should be prepared for starting. "They are not only the best kept, but the most luxuriant, the most brilliant I know anywhere! To be sure this is the very moment for them, and the weather has been just what it ought to be, both for flowers and foliage."

"Yes, it is so," replied Katherine, looking around her with an air of vexed admiration; "everything is in its greatest beauty; and for that very reason, I suppose, I am condemned to go away on Tuesday, to a place and people I don't care for, when, for the first time in my life, I wish to be at home for as long as there are leaves on the trees and flowers in the borders! Not to speak," added she, laughing, "of strawberries in the kitchen garden, which I expect Annie and the rest will have eaten up by the time I am back from the Moat."

"Then you would really prefer staying here to going?" asked Markham.

"Of course I should," answered she, rather bluntly; "why should I say so else?"

"I can see no reason, certainly," rejoined he, with a slight smile.

"Then what made you ask?"

"If you want to know," began Markham with a little hesitation . . . .

"Yes, I do."

"Why, the truth is, I thought you *would* hardly go anywhere you did not, on some ground or other, like going to."

"Did you? Well, you see you were mistaken," returned Katherine, gravely.

"So it seems; and yet—I know you enough of old to be even now rather surprised at your . . ." He stopped, and she added for him—

"At my submission, you meant to say, did you not?"

"I believe it is as good a word as any for what was in my mind," said he; "but why *should* you be 'for once in your life' submissive to a decree of change, when finding yourself 'for once in your life' contented where you are? Is there, indeed, a necessity—a duty—concerned in your going to the Moat?"

"I don't like to mention duty as one of my motives," replied she, coloring, "because I can't flatter myself that I am exactly making a sacrifice to that feeling; and besides I am afraid I was not very 'dutiful' yesterday evening when I found I couldn't get off without—without a sort of thing

that would be worse than any amount of temporary weariness at the Moat."

Markham confessed, that independently of the spite he had against all women who, after having moved heaven and earth to marry some luckless wight, *must* have sisters or friends to stay with them in order to "keep themselves alive," he could not feel very charitably towards Mrs. Spencer Langton. "But," continued he, "for as angry as I am with her and fate, I believe, in my heart, that you are doing what is right. For you *are* right in shunning, at all cost, any occasion for unpleasantness with your mother, now that she is visibly so much more interested in you than I have ever known her show herself."

"*You* think she is so too, then?" asked Katherine.

"Indeed I do," replied he.

"I am glad of it," she answered, "and I hope I am right in yielding to what she wishes without farther contest."

She spoke with a grave earnestness, which she immediately felt to be more than the subject called for (so far as it could be understood by the person she was addressing), and she added, in a more lively tone, "that to be sure there was next day, and the forenoon of Tuesday, for her to show him her new favourites on the library shelves. If we can spend two mornings among them without quarrelling," proceeded she, "it will be exemplary

conduct on both sides; and with the prospect of so little time to make up squabbles, there is a chance, I hope, that we may keep the peace; at any rate I will try."

"I don't echo your words," said Markham, "because, as far as I can recollect, I have never been in the habit of quarrelling with you."

"What a shocking story, cousin Lewis!" cried Annie, who now came up, armed with parasol and prayer-book, to inform them that "papa and mamma were ready, and just setting off."

"How can you say," exclaimed she again, as they all three turned into a walk leading to the outer gate, "how can you say you have not been in the habit of quarrelling with Kate, when I have seen her cheeks as red as that geranium, over and over again, after fighting with you!"

"I daresay you have, Annie," replied he; "but it's no prooof that *I* quarrelled with her; and I think she will confirm what I tell you, when I say that I was never angry with her for not being of my way of thinking, either about heroes or philosophers, though *she* has, I daresay, wasted some indignation on me for not always conforming to her views, moral or artistic. Am I not correct in my statement?" asked he, appealing to Katherine, who said she supposed she had often been very foolish in arguing violently; "so foolish," proceeded she, "that I suspect I often thought you were angry when it was only myself; but

I believe that if things had not been more as you say, we should have come to a real quarrel, now and then."

Annie was beginning to express her surprise at "Kate's taking *his* part," but stopped in the middle of her sentence, on their joining the rest of the party, with whom they now walked to church, Lewis Markham in front with Mr. and Mrs. Oakly, Kate, Annie, and the governess bringing up the rear with some of the younger children.

Monday morning was spent very much to Katherine's satisfaction, partly in wandering about the grounds, partly in endeavouring to convert Lewis Markham to an appreciation of some passages of Racine, to which he continued to deny the name of poetry and the praise of genius. He declared himself happy to enlarge the sphere of his poetical admirations, if possible, but could not be brought to admit within it either "Athalie" or the great scene in Bajazet, which last, he allowed, might have its effect on the stage, only *he* could not be pleased by speech or dialogue that was marred by an ever-recurring jingle. But, though Katherine persisted in declaring that he maintained this opinion either out of perverseness, or else simply by way of proving himself a good Englishman, her calm antagonist took it all so easily that Annie, who, on one pretext or other, contrived to pass best part of the morning in the library, was disappointed of the quarrel she was on the

look-out for during this and the equally important controversies that ensued. Perhaps her presence contributed to the quietness of some of the discussions, from the very fact of Katherine's being constantly reminded, by her young sister's keen, eager look, that she had an example to set—a dignity to maintain. It may also have been the case that Annie's eternal running in and out, "to fetch this" and "look for that," prevented any of the literary arguments and observations that were going on, from diverging into personal topics, or branching off to a reconsideration of the amount of grievance involved in the visit to the Moat.

The afternoon was taken up by a pleasant ride with Mr. Oakly and his cousin; and the evening went off cheerfully, between tea on the lawn and a few of the last songs learnt with Emiliani, besides the exhibition of Katherine's own drawings, and some of Mr. Desanges's, which were much easier to talk of than "the people she had met in Paris."

The forenoon of Tuesday was chiefly employed in "consultation" with Lewis Markham as to what Annie's "French lesson book" and "French amusement book" for that summer should be; as also which of Scott's novels she was to be allowed for her "odd time" reading. The "pro's" and "cons" of these selections involved so much, and opened such a wide field for discussion, that, if Mrs. Oakly had not looked into the library (possibly to assure herself that nothing "dangerous" was going on), the luncheon bell might

have chanced to ring before any one point was decided. Her remarks, which chiefly turned on her hopes that, "whatever happened, Annie would never take a book to bed with her," were not very luminous; but she stood by, nevertheless, taking more interest in what was passing than she usually did in matters of the kind, owing to the, so to speak, practical aim of the literary and educational remarks exchanged between her eldest daughter and Lewis Markham; while the younger, for whose benefit the whole matter was supposed to be taken in hand, was happily satisfied by the liberality of the choice finally made with a view to her amusement and edification.

"I did say," she observed, just as all had been prosperously settled, "I did say I wished Kate might go to the Moat, that she might tell us whether the people there are as discontented as we have heard; but . . . ."

"My dear Annie, I never was told such a thing of Mrs. Spencer Langton, and you should really mind how you take up notions, and talk about things you know nothing of," said Mrs. Oakly, in her most deprecatory tone; but it produced little effect on Annie, who replied in a thoroughly unabashed strain:

"I'm sure, mamma, you said yourself, the other day, that you understood they were a proof of how ill some love matches answer, which is the same as saying they are discontented."

"My dear, I meant that they were sadly ill off, which is quite a different thing."

"Well, mamma, whether it is or no, there's no harm in my wanting to hear about their real ways at home, as I did, and as I do now, rather, only I was going to have said that for all that, I'm very sorry Kate is going to them at this very time, because I don't half enjoy a story, French or English, when I haven't her to talk it over with, and to tell how I should have liked it to be."

"I suppose I should be hardly worthy so much confidence?" said Lewis Markham, inquiringly.

"No, you would be no use," cried Annie pertly; "one thing, I always see you are laughing at me when I talk about novels; and besides that, you don't half understand the kind of things she quite enters into, whether she agrees with me or no."

"I am afraid not," returned he, "and I see the post of your literary confidant is not to be discharged vicariously."

"There's the luncheon bell ringing," observed Mrs. Oakly.

"So it is, mamma! more's the pity!" cried Annie, as she slowly shut, and more slowly replaced on its shelf a book of prints she had been lounging over. "That bell," said she, "is putting an end to our last pleasant morning for one while! Mind, Kate, you are not to stay one day longer at the Moat than you can help! I'm sure a week will be enough, and too much there."

"You needn't be afraid, as far as I am concerned,

Annie, I assure you," said Katherine, as they crossed the hall from the library to the dining-room.

"That's a good Kate! and you will be back soon!" was the answering exclamation, the glee of which their mother thought it her duty to check, as far as she could, by saying to her second daughter, "that her sister was going to the Moat to do a kindness; and that if she felt herself wanted, and useful, she would surely not feel in a hurry to come away. It is very bad for a young woman like Mrs. Langton to be left alone," continued she, while seating herself at the table, round which the whole school-room party was assembling, "very bad for her, and very trying to the spirits of one who has been used to the cheerfulness of a numerous family in her former home."

"What a pity she ever left it!" thought Katherine, who could not entirely sympathize with the compassion expressed for the lady of the Moat, but she did not judge it expedient to reply in any manner to her mother's remarks; and as the business of helping and eating began in earnest, no more was said on the subject of visits, long or short, nor was any farther allusion made to the Spencer Langtons and their household.

Soon after luncheon the carriage came round, and Katherine bid good-bye to her step-father and to Lewis Markham, while Annie called out to her, to "remember how much she would be wanted back again!"

CHAPTER III.

THE Moat was a low-built, substantial-looking house, standing in a sheltered hollow at the foot of a hill, which had been, till within a few years, crowned by the fragments of a wall, supposed to have once encircled a baronial tower. The dwelling covered more ground than an ordinary farm-house, though, both in outward appearance and internal arrangements, it resembled one. It had indeed been chiefly used as such till about twenty years back, when the late Lord Harworth (father of the present owner) thought it worth while to have it a little modernized, and tolerably furnished, for his own use during the month of September. The place had been subsequently let to a gentleman, whose circumstances were straitened enough for the consideration of a very moderate rent to outweigh the disadvantage of residing in what was universally looked on as "the most out-of-the-way corner," both with regard to visiting and hunting, in the whole district. His family had always excited Mrs. Oakly's pity for "being obliged to live in such a low situation, with so much water about it," and Katherine's recollection

of the place, which she had once seen for half-an-hour in mid-winter, during one of her mother's rare calls upon "those poor Maitlands," was a sufficiently dreary one.

In summer, however, the effect produced was widely different; and as the carriage stopped at the little garden gate, which gave admittance to the paved walk that led up to the mansion itself, Katherine looked admiringly upon the front-door, which, protected by a porch well adapted to afford a sunny resting place in autumn or winter, now bloomed with roses, trained over it in clusters of rare profusion and fragrance. The garden, too, which was bounded on one side by the trout stream that so much alarmed Mrs. Oakly's imagination, and on the other by a closely-shaded filbert walk, was spacious; and though laid out after the old fashion of mingled fruit trees and flower beds, was, at this time of the year, gay-looking. The domain further boasted two fine mulberry trees, without mentioning certain sloping banks on which flourished strawberry-beds, that equalled, if they did not surpass, those at Wyngate, both in the quantity and quality of their fruit. These additional merits of the Moat were not, of course, of a nature to be discovered by Katherine at a first glance; but the whole place seemed to her, in its way, not only neat and comfortable, but pretty; though there was nothing about it that could claim the praise either of actual beauty or of picturesque antiquity.

The sound of the carriage wheels had probably given warning of its approach, for even as Katherine was alighting, the front door opened, and Mrs. Spencer Langton, holding a pretty little girl, of about two years old, by the hand, advanced to meet her. She kissed her warmly, and thanked her so heartily for her "great good-nature in coming to the world's end to stay with her," that Katherine could not help returning, with something more than mere outward civility, a welcome which was evidently given with real and natural cordiality.

"Oh, you have brought very little luggage for the time I mean to keep you, if that is all!" cried the lady, as Mrs. Oakly's footman carried Miss Desborough's box into the small oak-panelled hall. "To be sure," she continued, "there is not much variety of costume needed here! and what does for one week does for three in a quiet nook like this, as we all know. But will not Mrs. Oakly come out a moment?" added she, running lightly to the gate, from which the carriage had not yet turned, and addressing a courteous invitation to its occupant, "if she were not too tired," etc. But Mrs. Oakly "had not time—it was a long drive back to Wyngate." So, having duly complimented the rosy cheeks of Mrs. Langton's little girl, and as duly—nay, reverentially inquired after the "baby" (of whose existence Katherine was thereby luckily apprised), she leaned back in the carriage and drove off, slightly

kissing her hand to her daughter, and congratulating herself on the relief of having so safely deposited her there, where she was out of the reach of literary colloquies with that "needy relation" of her husband's, whom the Desboroughs had marked as "dangerous."

Katherine Desborough had a degree of stubborn honesty in her disposition, which sometimes gave an unexpected bluntness to her speech, and not unfrequently hindered her from "getting on" under those circumstances in which the "civil thing" to be said or done involved any sacrifice of sincerity. It was therefore fortunate that the "little turn before going in," proposed to her as soon as Mrs. Oakly's equipage had disappeared, enabled her to say, naturally, "that she thought the garden very pretty—prettier, perhaps, from its being so different from what was to be seen in the usual run of everyday country houses."

The real admiration expressed in look and words for what Mrs. Langton was accustomed to regard as simply old-fashioned, surprised as much as it pleased her, and she asked Katherine, half incredulously, whether she could be in earnest? "for," she added, "though we ought, Spencer says, to be most thankful for being here (and so I am, of course, you know), still I never should have dreamt of anyone's *admiring* house or garden."

"Well, you see *I* do admire it; there is at once such a stillness and brightness in the whole look of everything! One might fancy one was a hundred

miles from any other dwelling, without there being anything uncomfortably lonely or desolate in it's air—only peaceful! And how I like to hear the bees!" cried she, stopping near a stand of hives to enjoy the lulling effect of the busy insects' hum, the distinct sound of which bore witness to the quietness of everything around.

"I am very glad you are pleased with all these sort of things, for it will please Spencer so! He was almost angry with me for pressing you to come to a place where you *must* be bored, he said, and I was beginning to think I had done wrong perhaps; but now I feel that I need not be so scrupulous, as you are fond of what is quiet and retired, in good earnest; and to be sure nothing can be more so than this! If there was only a greenhouse, I should enjoy it immensely; but you know, without that, one can have so little pleasure with flowers! I am afraid, Miss Desborough, you will not think it so pretty inside as outside," proceeded the lady of the house, while shewing her the way in, after they had made the tour of the garden; and it was true that the "parlor," which enacted drawing-room, was gloomy, from the lowness of the ceiling, and the dark color of the doors and wainscoting. The look out, however, as one sat on the seats below the windows (which did not open down to the ground), was a pleasant one, extending over the prettiest part of the garden and some adjoining meadows; while the sight of well-filled bookshelves occupying

part of the other side of the room, gave Katherine hopes of not having to depend, entirely, for pastime, upon the conversational powers of those who were to be her companions.

She had just made this consolatory reflection, when a gentleman, dressed in what—for want of a more exact epithet—might be called a shooting jacket, made his appearance, and was introduced by his wife to Miss Desborough as "her friend Cecilia's" second brother. His greeting of Katherine was kind and courteous, though a shade of stiffness interfered with its being altogether as friendly as such a reception might be.

"Spencer won't believe," said Mrs. Langton, "that any young lady can be satisfied to sit down to a quiet chat in a country house, where there is not a large party to amuse her; and yet," she added, addressing him, "Cecilia has told you, over and over again, how Miss Desborough has seemed to enjoy herself when quite alone with her at Wyngate—no other company there at all! which was what emboldened me to ask her."

"If Cecilia had been still here," replied he with rather an embarrassed look, "I should have known our house contained one real attraction for Miss Desborough, who would not then have come here only to see so new an acquaintance as you, and a stranger like me! If she is ever kind enough to repeat her visit, we may hope that friendship helps to bring her back, though we can now be only

obliged to her for her kindness in coming to take the chance of what she may find us."

Katherine managed to bring out a moderately connected answer, to the effect that "she could not, in accepting the hospitality of Cecilia's relations, feel as if visiting strangers." And Mrs. Langton (only partially understanding her husband's speech, but satisfied by the reply made) now began asking Katherine "whether she thought Spencer as like his brother Oswald as some people did? Not that *I* see anything of it," continued she; "but I should like to know if it strikes a person who sees Spencer for the first time, as you are doing."

Katherine said, that she generally required to get accustomed to a face before she noticed its resemblance to another, but thought it probable that some similarity might exist, since others had remarked it.

"My dear Alicia," exclaimed the husband rather impatiently, "you might really wait till I am gone to wash my hands, before trying to get Miss Desborough to your side in that family controversy;" and he quitted the room, as if to leave his wife full leisure to talk as much nonsense as she pleased when he was not by to listen.

His features were, in fact, very like those of his eldest brother, for whom he had been often mistaken in childhood and early youth; but his countenance had now become so different, that it was no wonder

Katherine could not, then and there, trace the resemblance. His face was gentler, but it did not express such keen intelligence as Oswald's; and his bearing certainly lacked something of the freedom and manliness which distinguished his brother, though it would have been a mistake to say he was either awkward or effeminate-looking. Indeed his wife was so persuaded of his infinite superiority in appearance, that when she suspected anyone of cherishing an opposite view, she almost resented it as an injury, and had never quite forgiven Cecilia for the opinion (extracted by very unfair pushing) "that in good looks, so far as that went, Oswald had the advantage of Spencer."

Now, as Mrs Langton's best apology to herself and to her friends, for having made an extremely bad marriage, consisted in her persuasion "that dear Spencer was the handsomest man she had ever seen," it followed that she was not only very touchy on that point, but so indiscreetly anxious to find supporters to her side of the question, that she sought for such in and out of season, and was, on the present occasion, disappointed at being unable (even after her husband's departure) to draw anything from Katherine beyond general and simply polite replies. She possessed however enough of manners, if not of sense, to restrain any token of vexation, and she presently conducted her guest to a small neat room upstairs, which, whether from its white furniture, or from having a

more extensive look out, was more cheerful in its aspect than the sitting-rooms below.

"How I should have liked," said Katherine to herself, as she sat awhile at the open window before going down to dinner, "how I should have liked—before all that happened in Paris—to have staid for weeks and weeks in a place like this, alone with Cecilia, talking and reading all the mornings under that walnut tree, and then wandering about in the evenings till bed-time! But to be 'tête-à-tête' with her sister-in-law will be rather different!"

Nevertheless the evening passed very fairly; for it was luckily so fine and warm as to render it an enjoyable thing in itself to sit in the porch, and saunter in the garden as the day faded into twilight, and the softness of twilight was gradually replaced by the "clear obscure" of a cloudless and starry night. Spencer Langton was busy, most of the time, in a corner of the dining-room with something that looked like accounts, so that the two ladies were left to entertain each other, unassisted, but also undisturbed, by any share or notice he might have taken of their communications.

Thus left in perfect freedom to dilate on dress, society, Paris, music, town and country—in fact, upon what may be looked on as the usual "omne scibile" of women, Katherine found, that if her hostess was not very amusing, she was at least very

easy to amuse, as she either was, or thought herself interested by everything she could tell her of, in the whole range between bonnets and books. Her companion's disposition too, which inclined her to admire rather than to scorn any new way of feeling or handling the subjects discussed, rendered her considerably more agreeable to deal with in conversation than many others quite her equals in capacity, who think it necessary to prove that capacity by showing indifference to all they are unused to. She was, and frankly showed herself to be, *enchanted* to have a girl to talk with, who could and would enter in detail upon topics she liked beyond everything, but which she was debarred from even touching on in her intercourse with matrons who (like old Mrs. Lancefield) advised her as to her household affairs, or with her husband, who was apt to feel any allusion to the pleasures of society, or to the kind of amusement depending on wealth and position, as tokens of a wistful looking back upon the existence she had left, in order to live with him in a retirement which she had never duly realized.

This extreme and visible delight in her company was not entirely without its effect on Katherine; for, let our prejudices have been what they may, they rarely altogether withstand the flattering conviction of being highly thought of and admired; provided always that the "admiring" persons are not actually and utterly disagreeable, nor yet, what to the youthful and fastidious is even a worse

objection, reputed vulgar. Now as Mrs. Spencer Langton was certainly neither of these things, and Katherine was consequently not ashamed of being, according to the common phrase, "made much of" by her, there is no denying that she felt, as she was going to bed at night, considerably more resigned to her "banishment" than in the morning. It was fortunate; for the more she thought, the more she was convinced that, though her first invitation to the Moat had been nominally only for a week, she should never be allowed to leave it till such time as Lewis Markham's departure had rendered Wyngate a "safe residence." It was well, therefore, she considered, to make up her mind to it at once; and while determining not to be disappointed even if her stay were stretched to beyond a fortnight, she also determined to shorten the time, which might otherwise hang heavy on her hands, by drawing and by reading (for there was no piano) as much as good manners and good nature permitted.

"Cecilia is right, however," said she to herself; "her sister-in-law *is* more agreeable when you are alone with her—when she lays aside her little affectations—and you only see the kindliness, which is genuine, I am sure. She does not look, either, as if she were a discontented person—her husband does, rather; but I suppose Lewis Markham would be very angry with me for thinking it possible *he* may be the most to blame!"

Spencer Langton and his wife had been cer-

tainly *both* to blame; though when Katherine came to know more of the pair, she also came better to understand the trials of a man who had chosen for his partner in life a creature so utterly unfitted for being, in any sense of the word, his "helpmate." It was not Alicia Musgrave's natural capacity that was in fault; for, if it was not above, neither was it below, the average; it was rather that her mind had been cultivated to so little purpose, that, in spite of having gone through the usual routine of a "young lady's accomplishments," she seemed to possess no more power of calculating the consequences of her words or actions than a child of four years old. She had never reflected in her life; and it was not till after her marriage, that she was brought to feel, rather than to understand, that most advantages in this world have to be purchased at a price, whether of trouble, patience, or money. The result of this tardy enlightenment was, that notwithstanding her constant habit of repeating "that money wasn't happiness," she was growing, at the age of twenty-four, to attach an undue value to that golden talisman, which dispenses, or seems to dispense us, from the exertions or the endurance otherwise required for the attainment of our wishes. It thus frequently befell that, almost in the same sentence in which she boasted of her romantic contempt for wealth, she would betray an undignified regret for those things which wealth alone procures. Indeed, it *had* even befallen that,

while smarting under the evils which imprudence and want of foresight on each side had brought upon them both, the wife had shewn these regrets so plainly as to make her husband feel, if he did not say, "it was a pity she had not known her own mind sooner." He had attributed to her (on the strength of her refinement of air and countenance, as well as her good taste in falling distractedly in love with him—Spencer Langton) a generous spirit and great elevation of mind; and the moment he discovered his mistake, he thought himself as ill-used as if she had purposely deceived him. A stronger-minded man might have endeavoured to raise his wife's views and to improve her powers; but he thenceforward despaired of both, and thought it useless to make her understand *why* he disapproved of this or disliked that, which she saw by his manner displeased him, though without in the least penetrating the reason.

Even the first morning after Katherine's arrival, it was evident to *her* that Spencer Langton was annoyed when his wife lamented, oftener than was consistent with good taste, "their not having the smallest little pony-chaise to drive Miss Desborough about, and shew her the country;" and again, in the evening, similar lamentations on the subject of having "no piano for their guest," brought about a similar result. As far as she was concerned, she could truly say that the absence of these luxuries was of small importance in such weather, and in a place too, which, as she soon

discovered, possessed attractions of its own for one who, in her home at Wyngate, was used to nothing but what was completely "dressed," both in the garden and in the park, while beyond the ring fence there was only the high road, and a large village, surrounded by too much general cultivation to retain any peculiarity. Here she could wander in green lanes and meadows, sufficiently dotted with cottages to hinder their being perilously lonely, though "out of the way" enough for her to find pleasure in exploring what was, to her, a sort of new country. She had just knowledge enough of botany to give an additional interest to wild plants, whose beauty and comparative rarity would have made them, of themselves, objects of search and pursuit; and just enough practice in landscape drawing to say to herself, at sight of a picturesque turn in a lane, "Something very pretty might be made of that, only I could hardly venture upon it."

Mrs. Langton had no taste for such rambles; but her husband accompanied his guest more than once, on which occasions he talked more than he habitually did when sitting at home with both ladies. She did not find him an entertaining companion, like his brother, or like Lewis Markham; but he was sensible and well-informed; and, as he seemed glad to be conversed with, she had the satisfaction of feeling, when with him, that she might, now and then, talk of things more interesting to him than those which alone came

within the sphere of what his wife could appreciate. It pleased her also to see that he appeared fond of taking all natural opportunities to express his thorough satisfaction with his residence, his admiration for the country about it, and his sense of the means of happiness afforded him by his present position. His wife's perception of the same was evidently not so strong, as Katherine had ample means of judging, during the long talks which generally took place after her morning stroll, when she, with an old edition of Withering's British Plants in her hand, now listened to her hostess' remark, "that a rich man like Lord Harworth might so well allow Spencer the use of two horses instead of one," and now endeavoured, with more or less success, to ascertain the name and species of some newly-found flower.

It was during these long talks that Mrs. Langton thought fit to impart to her guest what she was pleased to denominate her "history," which she evidently considered a highly romantic one, and for which she expected to be paid in kind, calling Katharine "shockingly reserved," because she would neither admit that she had any love sorrows to talk over, or even that she had been "surrounded with admirers" in Paris. It must be confessed, however, that Mrs. Langton did not, on this occasion, justify Annie Oakly's opinion of her, by "teasing and teasing till she got what she wanted;" for, after but a moderate application of the teasing thumb-screw, she tacitly

consented to give her own confidence without insisting on an equal share in return.

There was thus nothing specific to render Katherine's life at the Moat unpleasant; she would rather have been at home; she would rather *not* have been under the roof of any of the Langtons; but she liked her walks; liked trying her hand at sketching trees and cottages where none of the Wyngate world was by to criticise; she liked reading Madame de Sévigné's letters under the shade of a leafy bower; while the whole was sweetened by the sense of giving a pleasure for which she was daily and hourly thanked by the "impulsive" Alicia, and now and then, in a quiet way, which gratified her still more, by her graver husband. That she was to stay longer than a week, that she was to remain for ten days certainly, was a thing which appeared to have "settled itself" before she had been four-and-twenty hours at the Moat; and now that a fortnight was talked of, a petition for the same was penned by Mrs. Langton, which her husband, who intended riding over to Wyngate to see Lewis Markham, was to deliver "with his own hands to Mrs. Oakly."

Had Miss Desborough been inclined to be confidential, she might, without pretending to the spirit of prophecy, have let her hostess know at once what the result would be. But she was not so inclined; and the fair Alicia went on speculating upon the chances which might affect Mrs. Oakly's decision, till the sudden recollection of some article

of dress she had admired on Miss Desborough the day before, turned the current of her ideas, and made her request, "as a great favour," to be allowed to take the pattern of it. Permission being granted, and the fashionable trifle produced from Katherine's room, Mrs. Langton began forthwith cutting out the paper shape which was to enable her to enjoy the full benefit of having a friend fresh from Paris. The business was no sooner achieved, however, than she observed with a sort of sigh, "that it was no doubt a satisfaction to have pretty things on; wherever one was, one liked it for one's own sake; but as regarded any *use* of them, or the chance of being seen, one might as well wear sackcloth when one lived so literally, so absolutely out of the world—so beyond the ken of every creature one had known!"

"Were you used to a great deal of society before you married?" asked Katherine.

"Why, my sisters and I didn't think it much then; it was little compared to what many girls have in the way of going out! And of course I didn't want *that* sort of thing to go on for ever—balls, you know, and regular parties. I didn't care if I never went to another, I'm sure! And I like retirement that is not downright solitude, which weighs upon the spirits, and makes me absolutely ill. But the truth is, though I hadn't an idea of it beforehand, that if one has so little as to be obliged to consider rent, and one has no carriage of any sort, it comes to being pretty nearly as if

one were in the deserts of Arabia! not that I should mind that either, if—if . . . but you see I thought I should be so much more *with* Spencer, and there he is, out all day, and when he does come in, he has not a word to say to me! How should he, when he has seen nothing and nobody that can amuse him, or anyone else?"

"But," observed Katherine, "it is surely better for a man to have something to do out of the house; it is not in their nature to cut out patterns or draw flowers; and I am sure they are much the better humoured for having plenty to do."

"Oh yes; that is true; and as Spencer is glad to be employed, and it is good for him, I'm sure I don't complain; for it isn't that I should like him to do what he hates, and live, as we were offered, with papa and mamma—indeed, I shouldn't like that, on my own account, though I was once very glad to go and stay there, but I soon found it wasn't pleasant, with my sisters thinking we took up so much room in the house, you know, and all that. But still it is trying; and the provoking thing is—when one has made every sacrifice—to have it thought (as all the Langtons do think, even Cecilia, though she's so good-natured, the same as the rest), to have it thought that one has stood in one's husband's way, and that after all, one is not the woman to make him happy!"

Miss Desborough hardly knew wherewith to answer this rapid outpouring of all Mrs. Spencer Langton's worst grievances; but before she had

devised a reply, she was startled by being asked in a quick short manner, "if she knew much of Oswald Langton?"

"I met him a good many times in Paris," answered she.

"Not before?"

"No, I was never acquainted with any of the Langtons, except Cecilia, till this spring."

"That seems so odd, considering you knew her so well; but I hope you don't think him so delightful as not to be able to hear him abused—for with Cecilia I was forced to keep my opinions a good deal to myself—she is so dreadfully fond of that eldest brother of hers! What she can see in him! But, to be sure, I remember thinking him good-looking and gentleman-like, and all that, before I was married, when we used to meet him and Spencer at the Pagets'; only one wouldn't have thought that sort of mere exterior advantage would have influenced a person like his sister. Are you not surprised it should?"

"I think," said Katherine, "that he is clever also; at least, he can be very agreeable when one meets him in society."

"Can be! yes, I daresay he *can* be when he chooses. Not that he ever was so much to any of us; he dreaded to commit himself by speaking twice to a young lady! He need not have been afraid of any of *us* taking a fancy to him! But that's his style of going on; and I have found out since, through Spencer, that it is his 'principle'

not to put himself in the way of marrying anybody, because he is not rich enough, which *I* call very unprincipled; for you know, or, at least, I have come to know since I have been a married woman, what sort of amends such people make to themselves; it's horrid, for it's so deliberate! And if he has not *said* so, he has quite given his brother to understand that, provided a man stops short of actually making love to his neighbours' wives, or of leading their daughters into mischief, he may spend his time how he pleases, and with whom he pleases, without its being the least harm! Now is not that shocking?"

"So shocking," returned Katherine, "that I can't fancy Cecilia's being aware of his having such a system; she could not, if he avowed it, retain any affection for him."

"I don't suppose he ever exactly avowed it to her, or anyone else; but she must know he acts up to it; for it's not for nothing that she wishes so exceedingly to see him married. (I'm sure I should pity his wife!) Indeed, I once told her what Spencer had told me, and she looked very miserable, but didn't at all say the thing was impossible; she rather took his part, if you can fancy it! telling me—not in so many words, of course—that she believed those were old Mr. Langton's principles! At least, that he had acted in a manner to tempt his sons to adopt such, which she regretted excessively, as you may suppose; only you see, with all that temptation,

Spencer did not like the notion of never marrying, having more real principle than the rest—at least, he never could bear to think of such a prospect after he had met me. Still Cecilia, as I said, takes Oswald's part in a manner, saying that he would have been quite different, either if he had been in the position he had been brought up to expect, or if—I forget all the 'ifs,' but I know it was something about his being disappointed of one thing after another, till he was too old for any profession. And then too, she flatters herself that, 'however he may have misspent his time, he has, at least, never injured another creature;' and that, even if he *had* taken up such a system as I suppose (which you see she can't deny, though I have no doubt she would be too glad), still she hopes he may change 'before bad company has degraded him;' makes it out to herself 'that an exaggerated notion of honour, as to engaging a girl's affections, has given a twist to his views of life;' thinks he shews so much 'good feeling and good principle on many points,' that if he only fell in love with a woman who really suited him, he would turn into—something like perfection, I believe! In short, she is so deluded as to fancy a nice girl would *not* be wasted on him! There's no danger of such an experiment, however, *I* can tell her, unless an heiress were to fall in his way (and, to do him justice, he has never looked out for one!), for, do you know, after he had spent two days with us, about a year after

our marriage, he told Spencer that he was confirmed, from what he had seen in our house, in his opinion of the impossibility of any comfort in marriage for people of our station in life, without wealth. And, more than that, he has since said in his own family (Alexander repeated it to Spencer) that he hoped never to be forced to pay us another visit—which I am glad we know, at any rate—but which shews he has not regard enough for his brother, to care to pass a couple of days where he has not everything about him exactly as he is used to. Now, after such a proof of his having no affection in him, and only valuing luxury and selfish gratification, is it not wonderful that his sister should see *anything* in him to interest and absorb her as he does? Of course he hates *me* for having been, as he considers, "the ruin of Spencer;" but I'm sure it's better to be poor than what *he* is himself! And now you understand why it provokes me so to see that Cecilia makes a favourite of him."

Katherine did understand, albeit her sympathy with her hostess, in the matter of Oswald Langton's dislike to being her visitor, was less hearty than it might have been, had she not previously heard a different version of it, both from Lewis Markham and from Cecilia, not to speak of guessing a little, from her own experience, what she might herself feel, if more deeply interested in Spencer Langton. Her private thoughts, however, remained unsuspected; and the lady continued,

though in rather a rambling fashion, harping on the subject of her brother-in-law, whom it seemed that she could not get even her husband to look on with due indignation.

"Spencer felt annoyed," she said, "but not angry about some things that had passed, and it really puts one in a rage to see what indulgence men can have one for another."

Katherine, having not unfrequently suffered herself from a similar irritation at home and elsewhere, here agreed fully with her; but she was becoming at once so oppressed, and so perturbed, by the whole disquisition that had been inflicted on her, that she wished it were possible, without subjecting herself to endless investigations, to entreat that the name of Oswald Langton might never be mentioned before her. It was an inexpressible relief when the appearance of little Mildreda, just waked from her forenoon sleep, diverted her mother's ideas, and Katherine endeavoured to retain them in a safe channel by immediately proposing to take a sketch of her. The offer was rapturously accepted, and the business of keeping the child quiet, during the undertaking, proved difficult enough to occupy Mrs. Langton fully, and so hinder her recurring to the subject on which she had so long expatiated. The picture, sketched before luncheon, and finished —as far as it was to be finished—in the course of that afternoon, was fortunate enough to give satisfaction. It might perhaps have been otherwise

had it been the work of one who stood less high in Mrs. Langton's good graces; but Katherine Desborough was, at the moment, so completely her hostess' "beau idéal" as to dress, appearance, position, etc., that she was willing to take her artistic capacity on trust.

CHAPTER IV.

SPENCER LANGTON brought back from Wyngate exactly that graciously worded answer to his wife's note which, as Katherine knew beforehand, her mother would be sure to return to so "convenient" an invitation. Her hostess' satisfaction was enthusiastically expressed—so enthusiastically that there was hardly anything left for her husband to say; but Katherine gathered, nevertheless, that he was pleased also. His long ride to Wyngate had otherwise proved disappointing; for, though he had found the ladies at home, and though Mr. Oakly, accompanied by Mr. Desborough, came in later, Lewis Markham had gone off on some distant expedition, and Langton was obliged to return home without seeing him. His vexation at this circumstance was not much sympathized with, for his wife was too impatient to show him Miss Desborough's drawing, to continue long a listener—and she fairly stopped him in the middle of a sentence by putting it into his hands, and bidding him "say who that was."

Now since there was no other child (except the baby) in the house, and no other such white

frock and blue sash in the parish, it was not, as Katherine well knew, precisely necessary to be an Œdipus in order to guess aright; but she was pleased—especially considering the way in which it had been forced upon his attention—at hearing Langton say, with a smile, "that it really was like the little monkey." She was afterwards given reason to believe, moreover, that yet more flattering remarks were made behind her back; for, in the course of the evening, her hostess asked her, with many complimentary prefaces, and as a *very* great favour, "if she would take the slightest of slight sketches of *her*, for Spencer, who had no picture of her but a miniature, taken just before their marriage, which he had always considered not to do her justice. *I* think it rather flatters," continued she, "but *he* does not, and I know you would be able to do just the sort of thing he would like with a few strokes, giving the idea of the whole figure, in a way regular artists never will do. Won't you try, like a dear creature, as you are?"

It would have been ill-natured to refuse, and Katherine consented immediately, though with the warning "that the attempt would be an ambitious one, and therefore less likely to be so far successful as the sketch of little Mildreda had been kindly thought."

"Your sitting to me is very good practice," said she, the next morning, as she began to work in earnest at the portrait of the fair Alicia, in

which, however, the person for whom it was supposed to be undertaken, appeared to feel marvellously little interest.

Spencer Langton was sincerely glad that Miss Desborough should remain to enliven his home a while longer; but, that point settled, he cared not whether she spent her time in taking the picture of the garden tool-house, or of his wife; and it was quite in vain that the latter essayed to extract from him an indication of preference for this or that dress in which to sit—no, stand—for her portrait, or to make him say that he liked her better with ringlets than with bands, or vice versâ. He thought she and Miss Desborough had much better settle those points between them; and the various little pieces of coquetry she played off to attract his attention to the fact that she was, after all, still quite worth looking at, and worth painting, failed entirely as regarded herself, though they perhaps elicited one or two more laudatory remarks on Katherine's drawing, than he would perhaps have otherwise thought it necessary to bestow. Not that he either said or looked anything unkind or contemptuous to or at his wife; but he and she had, during the two first years of their marriage, exchanged such unpleasant words, mutually given and received so much pain, in the course of discovering that neither of them knew what they were doing in binding themselves each to the other, that although their situation was now so much bettered, it was by this

time vain to try and re-awaken the illusions of a thoroughly disenchanted man. The means which had formerly availed her would serve no more, and she had not, as yet, the sense to see, that her only chance of getting back a portion of the influence she had for a short—a very short time—exerted over her husband, was by conforming herself cheerfully to the position her own choice had placed her in, and by rendering herself fit to be his friend and companion, instead of fruitlessly seeking to become anew his idol or his plaything. He was, in the meantime, happy to see her amused, both for his own and her sake, though greatly preferring the most matter-of-fact details of his daily business about Lord Harworth's farms, to standing by and encouraging, or even listening to, much the same nonsense from his wife's lips as he had heard with delight and admiration, when she was sitting for her miniature three years back. How provoking that the same thing should produce such opposite effects at different periods! And that, too, notwithstanding that the speaker of the softly-uttered nothings in question remained still young and pretty! But so it was; and the spell being utterly broken, it was well that there remained, on the part of the woman, more affection than might have been thought compatible with her extreme frivolity; and on that of the man, more sense of duty and principle than might have been expected from one brought up with the views his wife believed to be inculcated on all old Langton's sons.

Fortunately, she was not so sensitive as to feel hurt, beyond a moment, at the ill success of her attempts to revive her importance with "dear Spencer;" and, to Katherine's great joy, she was interested enough, on her own account, in the business in hand, to prevent her from again complaining of Oswald, or wondering at Cecilia's devotion to him. Mrs. Langton was besides so confident of being ultimately satisfied with the result of what she had herself planned, that several failures were not allowed to discourage the artist, who, at the end of two or three days, produced a sketch, which, if not strikingly like or perfectly drawn, had at least a certain grace about it, which was of more avail than any other merit it might have possessed, towards pleasing the lady whom it was meant to portray. Unfinished though it was, she insisted on showing it to her husband, and was busily engaged in endeavouring to make him express more admiration for it than he really felt, when she was interrupted by one of those events, the rarity of which she so often deplored—namely, a visit.

The "visit" proved to be from Lewis Markham, who, together with Mr. Oakly, had ridden over from Wyngate, in hopes of seeing Spencer Langton, whom he had missed three days back. They appeared heartily glad to meet now; and, after the first and more general greetings had been exchanged in the little sitting-room, went into the garden, while Mr. Oakly remained with

his step-daughter and Mrs. Langton. To the former he gave tidings of the good health of Blackberry (her own particular riding-horse), besides mentioning the day fixed for the Hazlewood and Waterfield dinner-party, adding, with a smile he could not entirely repress, "that they should have to do without Master Bob, as he was—or said he was—'previously engaged.'" With Mrs. Langton he was shortly occupied in inspecting the "family portraits" then lying on the table, which speedily underwent the sort of rough criticism generally bestowed upon works of art executed by a member of the critic's own household.

"Mrs. Langton hasn't got a black mark like this on her throat, Kate," said he, pointing to a shadow which was, in truth, too strong, and appeared the darker from the unfinished state of other parts.

Katherine "rose to explain;" Mrs. Langton laughingly declared "that Mr. Oakly was very unfair;" and after some milder judgments had been passed upon the sketch of the child, and upon another of the Moat itself, the drawings were put away, and they all went out to join the pair who were still pacing up and down the garden.

Spencer Langton now attached himself to his wife and Mr. Oakly, walking in a line with them, while Markham followed in their track with Katherine.

"They seem delighted to have you here," observed he, "and I don't wonder; especially con-

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sidering that *she* hasn't a notion of employing or amusing herself, and *he* is as weary as man can be of the exclusive company of a live doll; but for all that, you have what some of Annie's books call your "home duties" to fulfil, and as she has been very diligent with the Italian verbs you marked for her, I do wish you would come back and hear them while I can have some benefit of your company."

"Doing duty is doing what one does not like, generally, is it not?" asked Katherine, with a smile, "and at that rate, as I want very much to go home, I suppose I am 'in my duty' (like the fish in the story) while I am here, though I won't say I find I have quite such up-hill work as I expected."

"No, I conclude you have, now and then, a little rational conversation with Spencer, who is, or used to be, a pleasant fellow enough, though always inferior to his brother Oswald in capacity; but whether you are at duty or penance—or pleasure even—I do wish you would give the Langtons the slip, for my last day at Wyngate is Thursday; and whether it is that every hole and corner is booked already for September, or just because he thinks I have had my 'allowance of visiting' for the year, I see I shall have no autumn invitation from 'cousin George;' and I *may* sail for India in October."

During the first part of Markham's speech, Katherine felt amused at his innocent ignorance of his own importance and dangerous qualities; but

his concluding words added a graver element to what was passing through her mind; and between the awkward consciousness of reading the riddle too well, and the feeling of regret on suddenly learning that this was, perhaps, her last meeting for years with a friend she so much liked and valued, her look and manner betrayed a painful embarrassment, which at once hindered her from immediately replying, and struck the attention of one who, though she knew it not, had lately grown watchful of her countenance and demeanour. When she answered, it was to express—rather by implication than by connected words—that her own wish on the subject had little to do with the settling of her movements, adding "that she feared Mrs. Spencer Langton would think herself the worst-used creature on the face of the earth, if she left her before quite finishing her picture!"

"Oh—I should be sorry you did *that*, for poor Langton's sake, as *he* would be the real sufferer through her disappointment, I take it."

"Mr. Spencer Langton, I assure you, does not let himself suffer from hearing complaints and lamentations, in the way you imagine, for when anything of the kind begins in his presence, he just takes his wide-awake off the peg, and goes out of the house."

"Much the best thing he can do," observed Markham, "the only thing indeed, if he does not mean to be worried to death; as it is, he is more altered than I have often seen a man in the time,

since we last met; not that he isn't looking in perfectly good health—for *that* he does—but his countenance is completely changed, and the spirits he used to have, seem gone, though he says, with the most rueful aspect, 'that *he* is quite satisfied with his position.' Who would ever suppose, to see him now, that he was Oswald Langton's *younger* brothers."

"I never met him before coming here," replied Katherine, "therefore cannot so exactly estimate the amount of mischief done him in mind and body by poor Mrs. Langton, on whom I see you lay all the blame of her husband's having grown older and duller than when you last saw him."

"Well, I confess to something of a spite towards that little woman; for—though you will say it's no affair of mine if poor Spencer let her make a fool of him—I have no patience with her for bothering other people to go and entertain her, instead of being satisfied with what she has got. But you will come back early next week, won't you?"

"As soon as they will fetch me! of that you may be sure! I shall have been here a full fortnight on Tuesday."

"No more! I should have thought you had been at least three weeks away! But I see the horses are come round, and George is taking up his whip. Have you no message for Annie, about her Italian studies? Or anything else in the 'literary line?'"

"None at all; except that I am longing, as much

as she can be, for a 'talk-over' of 'Old Mortality;' I conclude she has read it by this time."

"I trust she has," said Mr. Oakly, who had heard Kate's last words, "for the day before yesterday, I can answer for her having sat two hours in the green-house reading it, when she might have had a ride; after which bout of historical novel-reading, she was pretty nearly as fit for the rest of the day's business as if she had been at a ball all night. I protested against such waste of time, but I was told, 'Kate had picked out that book for her to read in her absence;' so of course I had no more to say. Markham, we have only just time to be back by dinner. Mrs. Langton, I have known this place all my life, but never saw it look so well or so pretty as it does under your auspices. Good-bye, Kate; you shall be fetched some day next week." So saying, he mounted; Markham did the same, and both were soon out of sight.

"Yes, I understand," said Katherine to herself, as she and her companions moved slowly from the little gate whence they had seen their guests depart, to the seat under the walnut tree, where the two ladies established themselves—Spencer Langton lingering near them; "I *quite* understand," pursued she, mentally, "and shall certainly not expect to be fetched before Friday—or even Saturday—if that dreadful bug-bear should chance to stay four-and-twenty hours longer!"

"Is that Mr. Markham agreeable?" said Mrs. Langton, after awhile; "I have met him before,

but somehow we never found much to say to each other."

"I should call him very agreeable," replied her husband; "he is thought so, is he not, Miss Desborough?"

"By me, certainly," answered she; "but then in our house he is quite an old friend."

"Oh, I suppose he must be," rejoined Mrs. Langton, who, feeling by instinct that she did not please Markham, was but little disposed to be pleased with him. "Of course you have means of judging; but he gives me the impression of having a cold, unimpulsive nature; of being so very self-possessed that—I don't exactly know how to describe it—but—in short, I feel sure that man never was, and never will be, in love in his life!"

Her hearers laughed at this conviction, and at the vehement manner in which it was uttered; her husband saying, that he had never known her pronounce so harsh a sentence on such slight evidence.

"You are aware," added he, turning to Katherine, "that Alicia's mode of expressing her very worst opinion of a man, is assuming him to be incapable of falling in love. Cannot you, as Markham is such an old friend, tell us anything about him in mitigation of the judgment passed?"

"Why, really," said Miss Desborough, "though he is a relation of Mr. Oakly's, and consequently a sort of connection, I know too little of his

private history to be able to inform you; especially as I have never myself thought much about whether he was likely to have been in love or not."

"No, one never *would* speculate in that way about that sort of man," observed Mrs. Langton, "he has such an imperturbable look, and has such an extra steady way with him as he walks and talks; it would be no pleasure to anyone to be fallen in love with by such a mortal."

"I should say, my dear," returned her husband, "that if he *is* the remarkably stony individual you conceive him, it would be only the more flattering for the lady who *did* make a conquest of one so hard to touch."

"Well, so it might be, in one sense; but I can't bear the kind of person, though I daresay he is clever and sensible, and all that. He's a great friend of your brother Oswald's, is he not?"

"He's none the worse for that," answered Spencer, in a tone the sharpness of which (very unusual in the speaker) indicated his perception of what his wife's last words implied.

"I didn't mean to say he was the worse for it," said she, "but he is exactly the kind of man I can fancy being a friend of his."

"I believe he *is* that," observed her husband with significant emphasis, "and—independently of the pleasure of meeting, which we hadn't done since he was in England before, at the time of his mother's death—I am very glad he should have seen himself, how comfortably settled we are here,

before he comes across Oswald, who will, I know, like to hear of it."

"Is Mr. Markham going to Paris, then?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then how is he to come across Oswald?"

"Very easily; for Oswald is at Shadworth—will be to-morrow at least."

"How did you hear that?"

"From Cecilia, yesterday; she mentioned that he had written from Paris, saying they were to expect him in two days."

"You never tell me anything that's in your letters, Spencer!" said his wife, complainingly.

"I thought," he began—but then hesitating, he looked involuntarily towards Katherine, who was rising with the intention of leaving them to themselves under the walnut tree, when Mrs. Langton said carelessly:

"You needn't mind Miss Desborough, Spencer; she knows all the reason I have to complain of Oswald, and fully sympathises with me."

Spencer Langton's eyes flashed angrily, and he looked (Katherine thought) more like his brother than she had yet seen him, as he replied, in a tone of suppressed vexation, "that since it was so, he made it a particular request to Miss Desborough not to hurry away, for," continued he, "as you have been told all Alicia has to tell against my brother, it is fair you should hear my version of what has, I conclude, been related to you in *her* way:

"About two years back, Oswald spent a few days with us at a time when neither Alicia nor I had yet fully realized our position, or made up our minds rationally, to take some things in patience, and leave off struggling for others. We were discontented and dispirited, and there was not, at that period, much apparent hope of our growing otherwise. Is it wonderful that my brother should have made (to members of his own family) observations which were not calculated to flatter us if repeated back? That they were repeated may be laid to my youngest brother Alexander's boyish folly, which hindered his feeling that what *he* had listened to as a good joke, could not, at that moment, and under our then circumstances, be received as such by those upon whom the remarks had been made. I was vexed, and—I take infinite shame to myself for such weakness—was drawn on to tell Alicia the cause of my vexation. As I might have foreseen, she has never forgiven Oswald, attributing to him the lowest motives for the expressions that escaped him; and not choosing to see anything but pride, and a desire to keep us out of sight, in the trouble he has taken to settle us here. But I know better; for I know it is not every man who would have done what Oswald has done for me, hating too, as he does, to ask a favor, or lay himself under an obligation! He sought out Lord Harworth (with whom I had once been intimate, but had quite lost sight of) the moment he knew what kind of person he wished to employ

here; and more than that, he put it in my power to avail myself of what was finally offered me, both by assistance on his own score, and by inducing my father to do things he never would have done, but through the strongest exertion of Oswald's influence, as well as Cecilia's. It is through him that I have been saved from ruin, and through him that my wife and I have been helped to a position of comfort at least, if not of wealth and luxury. I should not have troubled you with this discourse on family affairs, had you not already heard more on the subject than I should have expected, or than you, probably, wished for; but I trust you will excuse me on the score of my anxiety to do justice to one for whom I am bound to feel gratitude as well as affection."

Having made this speech with the half constrained, half agitated appearance of a man who has broken through his usual habits under the goad of extreme provocation, he walked away with quick steps, immediately followed by his wife, who pursued him, weeping, and imploring him "to forgive her indiscretion this once."

How her entreaties sped, Katherine did not stay to see, for she went straight into the house, and up to her own room, where she sat till dinner time, now reflecting on the unpleasant discovery that Oswald Langton was after all in England, now thanking Heaven that she had not been tempted to confide her own opinions of him to his sister-in-law, and still recurring—through every other

thought and feeling—to the eager wish of being once more safe at home, "where," thought she, "I should be out of the way of quarrels and disagreeables such as I have just come in for here, and should not be worried by being made a party to discussions on the good and bad points of a man I know to be treacherous and unprincipled, yet concerning whom I *must* hold my tongue both to his friends and his foes! If my uncles could only see me with Lewis Markham! could only hear his quiet, old-friend-like fashion of wanting me back at Wyngate, just as if I were his sister or his niece! If there *were* anything in it indeed, they are certainly going the very way to make me think of him day and night; and as it is, I know I wish as much as he can—more perhaps, since all this tiresome talk about Oswald Langton—that I could but find myself to-morrow in the Wyngate library with him and Annie, instead of having to wait on here till over Thursday!"

She perceived, at dinner, that matters stood better between her host and hostess than she had feared, after seeing the look of settled resentment with which Spencer had turned from his wife, an hour ago, in the garden. *He* was just a trifle more silent than usual; *she* endeavouring to make a little more conversation than it was her wont to attempt at meals; and afterwards, when alone in the porch with Katherine, she told her, "that Spencer had forgiven her at last; but that she had never known him so angry before

about a little piece of gossip. And after all," proceeded she, "this wouldn't have happened if he had just told me quietly what there was in Cecilia's letter, for then I shouldn't have said what I did before you, which was the thing that put him out so dreadfully. *He* says he did not tell me because I always say such annoying things whenever Oswald's name is mentioned, and so he put it off, which was foolish of him at all events; don't you think so? I am sure I never should have made an observation about Oswald's leaving Paris, one way or another, for, as I said, how can it signify to us where he is? Then Spencer was almost as angry as ever, asking why I took pleasure in assuming that? and wanting to know 'if I had not found Oswald kind and agreeable when he was with us that once?' I couldn't deny it; but then you know it was all the more treacherous in him to go and say the things he did say at home afterwards. However, it was no use going back upon that to Spencer, so I just said how miserable I felt at having vexed him; till at last we kissed and made friends after a sort; and now I hope to have no more plague about Oswald for a long while to come."

Katherine inwardly but fervently echoed the wish, and was at some pains to start any such subject of conversation as might divert her hostess' mind from the discussions of that afternoon. A few millinery anecdotes served the purpose, and so

successfully, as to make Mrs. Langton forget entirely that she had had a quarrel with her husband that day, or that there existed such a person as his brother.

CHAPTER V.

IT appeared to Miss Desborough, as she took her early stroll on the following morning—during part of which she had Spencer Langton's company—that *he* also had recovered his wonted equanimity; though one or two trifles made her judge that the memory of yesterday's disagreements still clung to him. He did not, however, say a single word either about his brother, or his wife's prejudice against him; neither did he allude to her discontent, past or present, any more nearly than by expressing his thankfulness "for Mrs. Oakly's full house," which was to give "Alicia and himself," as he courteously added, "the enlivenment of her society a few days longer than *he*, at least, should have ventured to ask for in a place which, he knew, must be dull for those who had not, like him, plenty of business." He seemed relieved, Katherine thought, after having thus given her to understand that her presence in his house was a great pleasure, but that he considered it selfish to desire more of it; and he soon left her to pursue his own avocations, while she, struck by the picturesque effect of an old ivy-covered barn fast

falling into decay, began to contemplate the possibility of returning to the same place on some future morning, early enough to catch an hour or two of the peculiar lights and shades which were already beginning to vanish. It was something fresh to look forward to; and as the portrait of the "Lady of the Moat" was that day finished, and there was no other amusement in view, beyond the very doubtful one of accompanying her hostess to call on that old Mrs. Lancefield, who was literally the only person within reach for such a ceremony, the prospect of this occupation was an interest—nay, a godsend. Her little plan met with no opposition when she mentioned it on the Sunday evening; and on Monday morning, after a hasty breakfast in her own room, she sallied forth before either host or hostess had become visible, meeting, as she went, the boy who commonly brought the Moat letters from the nearest post-office. She inquired if there were any for her, and being answered in the negative, passed on; when perceiving, at a few paces from the garden gate, that she had left an important part of her drawing implements behind her, she returned in quest of it, and heard, as she passed Mrs. Langton's room, of which the door was ajar, the sound of talk so eager—not to say so angry—as to convince her that the conjugal peace either was, or would soon be, again broken. She hurried away the faster, congratulating herself as she went, on having chosen that day for her early expedition,

which was saving her from the risk of being drawn in, a second time, to witness the dissensions of this pair, who, she now began to think, must be really and truly as uncomfortable as Lewis Markham had described them. Her sketching time had been well chosen, and she worked away for upwards of an hour with more satisfaction than she had yet felt in like attempts. The change in the shadows as the sun rose higher, stopped her progress for that forenoon; but instead of returning immediately, she roamed about the skirts of a neighbouring wood in quest of orchises of rare kinds which were sometimes to be met with there. Having collected some of these, she walked leisurely homeward, enjoying the fragrance of the air, and stopping every here and there to gather wild roses and honeysuckles in the hedges. It was past twelve when she returned, through the orchard, to the Moat, which she entered by a back-door near the kitchen, where she asked one of the maids to bring her a jug of water. She proceeded, flowers in hand, to the dining-room, with the intention of arranging them in glasses; but before she had begun to do so, she heard herself called from the front porch by little Mildreda, who must have heard her voice when speaking to the servant, and repeated in a shrill tone, "Miss Desba! Miss Desba! come here!" She picked out the deepest coloured of her rose-buds for the child, and leaving the rest on the small sideboard, walked through the hall to the

porch, on reaching which she beheld little Milly springing towards her from the knees of her "uncle Oswald!"

She involuntarily stepped back, losing power and strength to that degree, that had she not leaned on the hall door-post, she must have sunk upon the floor. Langton advanced eagerly, and taking her hand, grasped it warmly, saying, "I told you I should be soon in England!"

She had lost her breath too completely to give any answer whatsoever, and let herself fall helplessly, without uttering a syllable, on the seat opposite that from which he had risen.

"Did you think," continued he, "that I was not in earnest when I said I should finish my story in England?"

"I hardly knew," replied she, panting between each word, "what you really intended; but," she proceeded, more steadily, "I certainly did *not* think I should ever have seen you in this house."

"Oh, yes—I understand; and you were not by, I conclude, when my letter came this morning. But I heard through Cecilia that Spencer would be as glad to see me as ever; and, since I have been here, I have made things up with Alicia; to do her justice, the reconciliation didn't take two minutes. They told me when I arrived, that you were out sketching, and I should not have known you were come in, but for this young lady's ears having been sharper than mine!"

As he spoke, he stooped to kiss the child (who

was staring up at him and Miss Desborough, as if trying to comprehend what might be passing), and then placed himself on the rustic chair, nearest that on which Katherine was seated. He was moving it still closer to hers, when, at sight of his sister-in-law approaching them, from among the flower-beds, he withdrew it half an inch, and, whatever he might have been about to say, had their "tête-á-tête" been prolonged, contented himself with uttering something in praise of the peaceful beauty of all that met his eyes.

The compliment to the Moat was not lost upon Alicia, who, after kindly greeting Katherine, observed to her new guest, "that she saw he was as much in love with their little porch as Miss Desborough, who would have it there was nothing so pretty in her own delightful home at Wyngate."

"I never had the pleasure of seeing Wyngate," said he, "though I have heard of it, and it's beauty, from Cecilia; but I do not believe *I* should ever like any part of it as well as I do this particular spot."

As he spoke, he looked around him, both within and without the porch, with an appearance of calm satisfaction with all he saw, animate and inanimate, which fully matched his words, and his sister-in-law remarked, "that she was glad there was so much sympathy of taste between her two visitors."

"To be sure," added she, "you have, I daresay, known each other's fancies about these sorts of things long ago, being old friends, or at least" (a

something in Katherine's countenance led her to correct herself) "being acquaintances of such standing, that I daresay you have often agreed to admire this kind of old-fashioned door-way."

"Miss Desborough never confided her ideas on the picturesque to me; but I don't wonder," continued Langton, "at her liking this place, if it were but from its contrast with most of what she has been called on to admire lately."

Katherine, meantime, sat as if fettered to her chair, a sensation not unlike that of a nightmare forbidding her to rise, and scarcely able to convince herself that she was not really under the influence of a dream, which brought about all that was most improbable in order to torment her, while she was yet only too sensible of the real and actual presence of the man she wished most on earth to shun. It seemed, moreover, strange, and inexplicable to the last degree, that he and "Alicia" should be talking together in the most friendly and familiar way, not three days after she had heard him mentioned by her, as a man whom only the most bitter compulsion could induce her to see or receive. So it was, nevertheless; for there sat Oswald Langton on the seat next her own, but addressing himself to his sister-in-law, between whom and him little Mildred ran backwards and forwards, pulling her uncle's coat, and being scolded for the same by her mamma, who then laughed, and sent her back to play the same tricks again. Katherine was, however, presently forced out of her trance of

astonishment by Mrs. Langton's asking her "how she had succeeded with her sketch? And if it were not nearly done?"

"Not quite," replied she, "but that reminds me that I left all my drawing things, and a large nosegay, in the dining-room," and as she spoke, she rose to go in quest of them.

She was followed by the two others, and Mrs. Langton shewed the unfinished drawing, with many ecstatic exclamations, to her brother-in-law, who took it in his hands to examine it, whereupon Katherine, without waiting for the compliments which her hostess evidently meant to procure her, left her performance to be praised, or blamed, as might chance, and carried off her paint-box, etc., with her bunch of wild flowers, to her own room. On reaching it, she shut herself up hastily, saying, almost aloud, as she pressed both hands on her temples:

"Oh, if I could but have told mamma everything, and so kept out of this man's way! Yet I felt so certain of not meeting him in *this* house, wherever else I might! If I could but stay up here till he goes! But when *will* he go? And the worst is that he evidently looks on me as almost his property! Takes the signs of my surprise—of my horror—for tokens of my being overcome with delight! And how can I contrive in this place to undeceive him? If he had sought me at Wyngate, that would have been easy enough!"

She was interrupted in her soliloquy by a gentle

knock at her door, which, on her saying "come in," was opened by Mrs. Langton, who had brought her sketch up to her, and now restored it with many expressions of admiration, both on her own part and on Oswald's.

"Weren't you surprised to find him here?" inquired she, when she had exhausted her compliments.

"Indeed I was," replied Katherine, now in good earnest busy with the arranging of the orchises and other field flowers on her toilet table. "I was unspeakably surprised at first by *seeing* him; and quite as much so, afterwards, by hearing you converse with him as if you had always been the greatest friends possible! I am sure it's very good of you."

"Oh no—it's not so very good, because, you see, I am partly obliged; Spencer insisted so this morning on my welcoming him cordially; and then besides, some how or other, Oswald himself talked me over the moment he came, taking blame to himself for having expressed his vexation at things that gave him pain, in a manner he has now long repented of, and assuring me that he has quite altered the opinions he once had, since hearing Cecilia's account of her visit to us. So you know, what could I say or feel, but that I should never think more of those old stories, and was heartily glad to see him?"

"And did not you expect him before this morning?" asked Katherine, after a pause.

"No, for through somebody's carelessness his

letter, which ought to have come the day before yesterday, only made its appearance to-day; and as it said, 'that if he didn't hear to the contrary he should start for this place,' his not getting an answer did not signify. It's all right as it turns out, and of course she acted for the best; but I own I was sometimes afraid Cecilia might do this, in her zeal to make her brothers just as they used to be together. I suppose she *is* very sensible as well as very good, and I daresay now that she has her reasons for thinking Oswald just as good—in disposition at any rate—as Spencer is; so I am half sorry I told you those disagreeable things about his principles and way of life, for it isn't right to prejudice people, and Spencer would be *so* angry if he knew!"

"It would be very needless if he were," answered Katherine, now diligently employed in washing her brushes, "very needless, at least as regards *my* being prejudiced; for I had—it would be hard to tell why—no exalted opinion of Mr. Oswald Langton before; but you may depend upon it *I* shall not betray you!"

"Oh I'm sure you wouldn't, only don't, pray, snub Oswald (I didn't mean to use that word if I could but find another that would do); don't at least, while you are here, for I might be asked, 'why you had taken a dislike to him?' and you walked off so suddenly, just now, when you bundled up the flowers, that he looked after you quite—quite as if . . . ."

"As if I ought to have waited humbly and

patiently for his indulgent verdict on my blotted paper?" interrupted Katherine, throwing back her head rather haughtily while she smoothed her hair before the glass. "But," added she, forcibly taming herself, "I will not be wanting in politeness, I promise you; I grew impatient just now down stairs, and thought I should never get what I wished to do, done by luncheon time. Now it is all finished, and I am ready to go down with you, and behave myself like a well-bred young lady."

"My dear creature! as if I could ever have meant that you were likely to behave like anything else!" exclaimed Mrs. Langton, putting her guest's arm in hers to go down stairs, in the course of descending which Katherine reflected, that to show anything that could be construed into an air of pique or resentment, might confirm her Paris acquaintance in the idea that he was an object of interest to her; and she therefore accompanied her hostess into the dining-room with a mind and a face sedulously made up to give token of nothing but quiet courtesy. She thought, as she entered, that Oswald Langton cast a curious, enquiring glance at her, but she could not be sure; and whether it were that he was satisfied with what he read in her countenance, or that he found it vain to attempt gaining any information from it, he turned his apparent attention immediately to his sister-in-law, whom he seemed extremely desirous to propitiate. This endeavour was as successful as he could wish; Alicia was evidently delighted,

and grew almost confidential with him before many minutes were over.

"I confess," said she simpering, as he paid her some compliments on little Mildreda's appearance, "I confess I *used* not to agree with Spencer when he has said Milly was like you; but now that I see you again—I dont know how it is—I believe I see something of the likeness too."

"That is very complimentary to me," said her brother-in-law, "all the more so from your having been once of a contrary opinion; perhaps there are hopes, Alicia," added he, "that you may by degrees grow less affronted at Cecilia's and my father's notion of my likeness to Spencer himself?"

"Oh, it doesn't affront me the least, I assure you," answered she, "and I daresay I may get to see it in time. Tell me now, Miss Desborough," said she, turning to Katherine, "tell me, now you know Spencer's face well, whether you can see the resemblance you could *not* see a fortnight ago."

Thus appealed to, and resolved not to show any trace of missish embarrassment, Katherine looked steadily at her opposite neighbour for two or three seconds, and said to his sister-in-law:

"Yes, I do now see the likeness to your husband, though when I first saw him, he did not in the least remind me of his brother."

"And yet Oswald can't be altered since you saw him, not a month ago," observed Alicia.

Katherine had a feeling that he *was*, though she could not have described how, and was far from

expressing what passed through her mind; but he himself said, after a moment's reflection:

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if I were altered—altered in countenance—since Miss Desborough last saw me. Don't you remember my telling you," continued he, addressing her, "that one's whole being is influenced by the place one lives in, and the set one is surrounded by? You would not believe that in Paris, but it is so."

"I fully believe it," replied Miss Desborough, "as regards one's mind."

"And one's face through one's mind," rejoined he. "I feel a different man here to what I did in Paris, so I don't see why my face shouldn't tell something of the matter."

"Did Paris disagree with you?" asked Alicia, with a look of interest.

"Yes, exceedingly," answered he, with perfect gravity of tone, in spite of which Katherine fancied she perceived a slight and instantly repressed curl of his lip, as he made his matter-of-fact answer.

"I had no notion of that," observed his sister-in-law; "I wonder you staid there so long. You ought not!"

"No, I ought not," repeated he, with an air of conviction, which would have inclined Katherine to laugh, had not the recollections, which lent a double meaning to what he said, been of a nature to stop any disposition to mirth.

"Paris seems to have suited Miss Desborough perfectly," remarked Mrs. Langton; "*she* has never been the worse for it."

"No—she has not been affected by that air, I know," said he, looking at Katherine; "some exceptional natures are not; but even they are right in avoiding too long a trial of it."

"I never heard Paris spoken of in that way before!" cried Alicia, in surprise. "Is it something new?"

"Why, I can hardly say," returned her brother-in-law; "but," added he, in a gayer tone, "it wouldn't do *you* the least harm, Alicia! Do you think it would, Miss Desborough?"

"I don't see why it should," said Katherine.

"It would do her all the good in the world for a little while," continued he, "but not for too long—I should not advise Spencer to give you more than six weeks of it."

"Oh! I should be too happy if he gave me three! but there's little chance of my ever getting one, as things are," said she, with a half sigh, "not that I ought to be discontented, I know."

"No, we none of us *ought*, only we all *are* sometimes," was his careless answer as he rose from table, and looked out of the window. "There are some very ugly clouds there to the right," continued he; "how quickly they have come up! for I don't think I ever saw a sky so cloudless as when we sat down to luncheon. I wonder when Spencer will be in! He said his business at Bush Farm wouldn't take him two hours, and I just wish he were back, for if we don't start soon, it will hardly be safe for us to start at all!"

From these observations, and some others, that

passed between him and his sister-in-law, Katherine gathered that the visit to Mrs. Lancefield, whose abode was situated at the other end of a long straggling common, was to take place that afternoon; and that their new guest intended to be of the party. She therefore determined—since fatigue after her early sketching expedition would provide her with a good excuse for it—to decline a second walk; a proceeding which—she trusted—would show Oswald Langton, without any of the incivility his sister-in-law deprecated, that she was not altogether so desirous of his company as she suspected him of believing her to be. As it turned out however, she had no means of giving the mark of indifference she had planned; for the heavy clouds, which had been lately gathering, and were now driving along the sky against the wind, threatened an approaching storm, which was presently announced by the sound of distant thunder, and in a few minutes more, burst in large drops of rain, Spencer Langton returning only just in time not to be drenched by the torrent which fell the moment he was housed.

The weather having thus taken matters into its own hands, it followed, after a few expressions of disappointment on the part of the two men, that they settled themselves for the afternoon in the sitting-room with the ladies, chiefly talking together about a number of things and people of whom Katherine knew nothing. Had it been at Wyngate, she would have gone to her room; but

where she was, it would have seemed peculiar to do so, and would, she believed, have annoyed her hostess exceedingly. She therefore sat bending over the carpet-work, which (without being a favourite employment) was her resource on such occasions, listening—whether she would or no—to the questions and answers the two Langtons were exchanging on the subject of old friends, relations, schoolfellows, etc.; and wondering when the rain would in so far diminish as to render a man's walk possible—or at least to admit of their finding their way, with the help of umbrellas, to the stable and the dog-kennel. Of this there was little hope, as the rain continued violent, and the brothers appeared perfectly satisfied with the pleasure of each other's company and conversation, which both seemed to enjoy with the unfeigned delight of strong affection, after a suspension of intercourse which had apparently given as much pain to the one as to the other. She thought that Oswald was watching her, even through his long desultory talk, but she would not raise her head to see; and while she heard him conversing on subjects—and in a manner so totally different to what she had always previously looked on as (so to speak) *belonging* to him—she asked herself what it precisely was which rendered his countenance also, in some respects, so different to that she had known in Paris? Whether the difference were not a mere delusion of her imagination, helped by his own assertions? No—it was no delusion! for,

whatever might be the cause, his face wore, in her eyes, a franker, kinder—nay, an *honester*—expression than she had habitually seen on it. The sarcastic look, once so frequent, might have been thought to have vanished altogether, but for its momentary reappearance during his talk to Alicia at luncheon; and the absence of this it chiefly was, which occasioned his likeness to Spencer to be so much more observable. Katherine could hardly believe in his identity with Lady Carew's visitor, as she heard him inquire, with the warmth of sincere attachment, after elderly members of his family, with kindly interest after the well-being of quondam servants in his father's house; in short, after many and various individuals, the memory of whose obscure existence would, she should have supposed, have long utterly vanished from the mind of one so given over to the world—in the worst sense of that expression—as she believed Oswald Langton to be. Could all this be acting, for some present purpose? But it was plain that there was nothing surprising in it to Spencer, who, if not a genius, was no fool, and not more likely than any other man of average sense to be "humbugged" by one he had known all his life. She could come to no conclusion on this subject; but her endeavours to do so sorely interfered with her correct execution of the work she held in her hands, of which she was obliged to unpick nearly all she had done in that sitting.

At about five o'clock the rain subsided, and the

brothers went out to have a look at all that was to be seen within the immediate premises, not without some unsuccessful attempts, on Oswald's part, to persuade his sister-in-law and her guest that they would not find it particularly wet under foot. The moment they were gone, Miss Desborough started up from the chair on which she had set immoveable during the last two hours, and throwing her Penelope's web from her, exclaimed:

"I can't think what makes me feel as if I couldn't get forwards or backwards with that disgracefully simple pattern, or what has wearied me so indescribably in sitting still from three to five, when, in general, I don't mind a sedentary afternoon the least—often think it a sort of treat."

"I suppose," replied her hostess, "that you have been bored by their talking of everything that ever belonged to—or was connected with—any Langton whatever; and I don't wonder. But you know I can't help being glad to see Spencer so pleased; and I *do* like Oswald for being so *very* happy to make all up with us, and to see us comfortably settled in this place. How I wish he might marry some nice person—who had a little money, of course—and come to take the Lancefields' house, if they are obliged to go and live in Devonshire, as they talk of doing next year.

Katherine did not remind her of what she had said the other day, implying her opinion "that a nice girl would be wasted" on such a reprobate as she then held Oswald to be. Nothing had, in fact,

occurred showing him to be one whit less unprincipled than he had been then pronounced, except that he had behaved politely to his sister-in-law, and admired his niece. There was no use, however, in making any observations, and Katherine went up to her room to rest herself in solitude, and read—if she could manage to read—for the hour which was to pass before getting ready for dinner. She did not find it easy to attend; she might as well—as far as employing her mind went—have staid with Mrs. Langton; but she thought it tried her spirits and temper less to sit alone thinking of *that* day at St. Cloud, than to listen to her hostess' recantation of half she had said to her since her arrival, and to be on the stretch to parry such appeals or remarks of hers as might lead to embarrassing questions, or the excitement of most undesirable curiosity. At last, after the clock of the village church had struck six, she began, slowly and unwillingly, to make her usual change of attire preparatory to returning into the company of one whose presence, instead of becoming gradually indifferent, perturbed her more and more in proportion as she observed the contradictory—or seemingly contradictory—elements in his character. She would not go down stairs the moment she was dressed, for fear of encountering—or rather for fear of being supposed to seek—a "tête-à-tête;" but having, as she thought, heard Mrs. Langton descend, and knowing it was now about the (somewhat uncertain)

dinner hour of the Moat, which was generally accelerated by the fact of a rainy evening, she even left her apartment and betook herself to the sitting-room; on entering which, however, there was no Mrs. Langton to be seen, only the maid seeking something for her mistress on one of the tables, and Oswald Langton reading the paper on a window seat. He laid it down as Miss Desborough came in, or rather as the servant went out of the room; and drawing nearer to her, observed, "that he had not yet heard if she were very happy to see England again? or if," continued he, with a smile, "when you *did* walk under your Wyngate trees, you wished for the Tuileries?"

"I have not regretted Paris," answered she. "I was very happy to return home."

"You were! I make no doubt of it; but you looked so severely before you while stating the fact, that I am half tempted to ask if this great happiness is—what I should be sorry to think it—already in the past tense?"

"Of course, it is not possible," replied Katherine, with an attempt to relax from her extreme severity of aspect, "that one should continue long in the kind of rapturous delight one feels on seeing those one most loves after a considerable absence; in that sense it may be said I *was* more happy than I am at this moment; and besides," continued she, raising her eyes, and gathering courage as she spoke, "though your sister-in-law is extremely kind, and your brother not less so, I would rather,

if it could have so suited them, that my visit here should have been put off till I had had more time for enjoying all that *did* make me so happy on my arrival from abroad."

He cast a somewhat anxious glance on her; but within a moment his countenance brightened, and he said gaily:

"Oh, you have been a little wearied with poor dear Alicia; Cecilia told me how she thought to carry you off the first half hour she ever saw you! which, I confess, was what ordinary mortals would consider rather a cool proceeding; but the little woman does not think the rules that govern ordinary mortals were ever made for her—spoilt child as she is, for her own and Spencer's misfortune! Not that I ought to abuse her, now she has so amiably forgiven me my offences, and shown such kindness of heart, in taking in good part from Cecilia much that few women, spoilt or unspoilt, would take from a sister-in-law, however perfect. She adores you, too; and, whether it be owing to your companionship or my sister's, or to both (for I don't attribute much to her own quantum of sense), she appears to me a different creature to what she was when a near sight of her, and her ways, led to my making that unlucky speech, which, as I daresay you have heard, brought such obloquy on me. The truth is that, as I saw her then, she seemed to me likely to do nothing but destroy Spencer's spirits and temper, with his worldly prospects into the

bargain; and if I generalized the feeling into an oversweeping clause, it was not very wonderful; though I ought not to have come out with it before Alexander. But all's well that ends well! She is immensely improved; is, I believe, really attached to Spencer, and I don't see why he shouldn't be a happy man enough, after all; though he might have chosen more rationally, putting fortune out of the question. But," proceeded he, in a lower voice, "*I*, at all events, have reason to be glad she laid violent hands on you, for—"

At this moment his sister-in-law entered the room; he turned hastily round, and addressing her in quite another tone, inquired "why she had chosen to sit for the picture which Spencer had just been showing him, with her hair done quite differently to the way she actually wore it? Did Miss Desborough wish it to be altered?"

"No," replied Alicia, "it was not that—I had a reason—I used once to do it so, and—but there's Spencer, and I can't tell you more. At least we must go in to dinner now."

They did so; and the meal would have been pleasant enough to all concerned, had not Katherine felt oppressed by the reflections forced upon her by that half sentence of Oswald Langton's, which had been cut short by his sister-in-law's appearance. She *had* thought it possible, or at any rate not *im*possible, that he might be following her to his brother's for the sake of a mere gratification of

vanity; in which case it was her part to let him see, as plainly and as soon as she could, that she did not desire his attentions. But if, whether impelled by love or interest, he were indeed come for the purpose of making a decisive overture, there was no use in drawing back from opportunities for his making of that overture, the rejection of which would settle all difficulties, and put an end to her intercourse with him. That her answer should be a rejection, was a point on which she did not waver; but the more she thought of having to go through an ordeal which she had considered quite disagreeable enough as regarded Robert Hazlewood, the more she longed for the power of informing Oswald Langton, by means of some winged messenger or fairy scroll, that it was useless to address one so absolutely determined against him. He, in the meanwhile, who only saw the long black fringe of her eyelids droop more and more heavily, and the fitful coming and going of her colour, as she sat silently at the table, might well fancy—and she herself knew it—that such irrepressible emotion, such utter inability to take part in the conversation of three persons she knew so intimately, was only to be accounted for on a ground most flattering and encouraging to himself.

"I wish it were over, and then he couldn't think what I am sure he is thinking now!" said she to herself, as, dinner being ended, she crossed the hall into the sitting-room with Mrs. Langton.

But two minutes after, when Oswald tried to make her go into the porch with him to look at a peculiar effect of the sun's last rays on the clouds, she declared she could see it as well from the drawing-room window, and perversely refused to avail herself of Spencer's opinion, "that the air was no longer damp," in order to stroll a few steps in the garden, as she had done, almost every evening, between dinner and tea. The horror of having to say the decisive word (all resolute as she was with regard to what that word was to be) inclined her to delay, and led her to think that *perhaps* Oswald Langton might be made to understand her, without the actual question and answer passing between them. But on this "perhaps" she could not much rely; for it was evident that if disappointed, he was not angered by her want of compliance; and she was obliged to conclude that he probably attributed it to mere shyness, and fear of being noticed by his brother and sister-in-law, to both of whom he talked on with a quiet cheerfulness, a serenity of eye and brow, which indicated the happy ease of a man who looked forward, with little doubt and less fear, to prospects every way satisfactory.

The evening came to an end at last, as the afternoon had done, and Katherine repaired to her chamber and to her bed, where she lay for the first hours of the night in restless longing for forgetfulness of all that had passed in Paris, and then only slept to dream of journeys by sea and land,

of endeavours to avoid Lady Carew, who was always in the next room to her, and of unsuccessful sketches of the ivy-covered barn, which at last tumbled down of itself, just as she had taken her pencil in hand to make a final attempt from it.

CHAPTER VI.

ON waking next morning, Katherine wished she might stay all day where she was. "As I could manage to do," thought she, "were I at Wyngate; but here it would give too much trouble, would create too much commotion, so I must just endure whatever awaits me downstairs to-day." She accordingly got up, dressed, and went down to breakfast, with the unpleasant consciousness of a deep blue mark under each eye, bearing testimony to the disturbed night she had passed, and likely to be noticed by all, and misinterpreted by some of the company. No remark was made, however, either when she joined the family, or during the meal; but afterwards, when the men had gone out of doors, Mrs. Langton exclaimed:

"What is the matter, my dear child? you are looking quite ill this morning."

On Miss Desborough's replying "that she had been a long time getting to sleep, and still felt tired," she inquired "whether storms, such as they had had the day before, generally oppressed her? Because," continued she, "I couldn't help noticing how very silent, absent too, you were the

whole afternoon and evening—I think it must have been the influence of the atmosphere on your nerves; and I was saying so to Oswald before you came down, to explain to him why you were so different to what Spencer and I had described you. He thought I was right too; for he says he has often seen people—ladies—affected just as I am sure you were yesterday."

It was difficult for Katherine to repress the vexed irritation with which she listened to these comments upon her demeanor, which, as she plainly felt, were all likely to tend one way—namely, to the strengthening of Oswald Langton's hopes. But she answered calmly, "that she had not known a storm affect her so before," and put her head out of the window, to breath that deliciously fresh and exhilarating air which fans the earth on the morning after a summer storm.

"How charming it is!" cried she; "and everything has dried so thoroughly, that I think, though it *is* late now for the proper lights, I might still go and give another touch to my yesterday's drawing."

"I think you couldn't do better," said Mrs. Langton, "the walk will be good for you; and besides, I heard Spencer say he was going to take Oswald to look at the farm there, so you would be sure to have the company of one or other of them in your way back."

This information immediately determined Katherine to go no farther than the garden, into which she stepped at once through the porch, delighted

to escape from Alicia's observations, and still more so to feel herself sure of being able to wander undisturbed for the next hour among the flower-beds, and beside the stream, without any danger of stumbling on her fellow-visitor. The breeze cooled her cheeks; the sight of the renewed verdure and life given to the whole vegetation around by the late rain, gratified her eyes; while her whole being was at once strengthened and calmed by the influence and aspect of nature thus revived and refreshed. She walked towards the orchard, and then along the filbert walk, when, at the end of it, leaning against one of the large walnut trees, she beheld the very man in her temporary distance from whom she had been rejoicing. He perceived the slight start she gave on catching sight of him, and said, as she stopped in her walk:

"You seem surprised, Miss Desborough."

"I thought," answered she, "that you were gone to some distance off with your brother."

"He wanted to take me somewhere or another, but—I thought he could do his business as well without me, and I mine perhaps best without him."

These last words were muttered in a very low tone; but Katherine heard them, and was provoked with herself for having left the house, to which she could not now fly back on the wings of a wish.

"Which way were you going?" asked he. "Back through this walk?"

"Yes—no—" she said, "I came through it, and will go the other way now."

"Don't you like the filbert-walk?" he inquired; "yet it might remind you of what I remember you rather admired at the Baron de R——'s."

"Oh, the Charmille?"

"Yes, the Charmille, which I told you I hated (I don't hate the filbert-walk, mind! only you *will* take the shortest way homewards). I wished then—that evening under the Charmille—that I might one day be again on English ground, under English trees, as I am now—and am thankful for it! You were angry with Alicia for getting you here, I believe; but you can't expect *me* to sympathize; for, though I might—though I should—have sought you in your own home. . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Langton," interrupted Katherine, "I regret more than ever that I left Wyngate when I did; for my doing so has given rise to mistakes, I fear, and—I ought to tell you at once—that if, in addition to visiting your brother, you came here for any purpose connected with me, it was—totally—entirely—useless."

"Totally — entirely — useless!" repeated he, with a look of astonishment and disappointment unspeakable: "were those — *are* those — your words?"

"They are," was her distinct though scarce audible reply.

He was silent for a moment, and then said in a low, angry tone.

"There's many a man who in my place—having said no more than had passed my lips—would turn round on you, Miss Desborough, with the question of 'how came you to think I travelled here for your sake?' and I might deny it if I chose! But you are straightforward—and by Heaven! so must I be, when I am with you; so I will not try to make out that you were premature in your consideration for my feelings; for the truth is, I *did* come here—partly indeed to make peace with my brother and his wife, but something more for the purpose of telling you I had loved you from the night of our quarrel about the Korinski business, and of asking you to become mine now and for ever; which, I am to understand, you are determined not to be?"

Her laconic answer was a "yes," which, though meant to convey refusal, did not perhaps give a strictly suitable reply to his speech, and he said quickly:

"Your 'yes' means . . . ?"

"That it is not in my power to return what you have just expressed."

"That is speaking plainly, at least; and I must either have been a blockhead or a puppy," added he, striking his forehead.

"Without being either of those things, one may be mistaken," said she, gently.

"No, for whatever you are, you are no coquette—have not set to work to deceive me, I know!"

"I hope not," returned she earnestly.

"So it follows that I deceived my*self* like an idiot! for I confess that I did not come absolutely hopeless; who is, when he declares himself? Well, I have no more to say; for when a woman has once told a man she won't have him, there's no use in asking her 'why,' since her action shows she doesn't like him, and that's enough."

After these words Katherine expected him to move away; but he continued to walk side by side with her in the direction of the house, and *she* could not quicken her pace, so violently did she tremble in every limb. He stopped however not many yards from the porch, and looking full at her, said:

"I am acting against my own maxims in troubling you with another word; but there is something—and your not being a bit of a coquette makes me think the more of it—something in the look and way of you that urges me to ask one more question. Has your resolution to have nothing to say to me been caused by anything that Lady Carew has thought fit to tell, or to give you to understand, concerning me?"

Katherine could not reply instantly; but after taking a deep breath, she drew herself up as if to gather strength and voice, saying steadily:

"No! my resolution has been made independently of anything said to me by Lady Carew."

"If so," cried he, in a hurried tone, "I have been mistaken again, and I can only beg you to excuse my pertinacity. You will not be farther

annoyed by my presence here or elsewhere; but," added he, turning back towards her, "though you may find a man who deserves you better in some senses, you will hardly, Kate Desborough, meet one who loves you better than he on whom you have just bestowed such bitter truth!"

He rushed into the house; and she, unable to persuade herself to follow, hastened instinctively back into the farther walks of the garden, in order to secure herself against any meeting with Mrs. Langton, till she had, in a measure, composed her countenance and her mind. She strove to do both as she took refuge under the close shade of the filbert walk; but she no sooner found herself under a cover, which she knew hid her from all human eyes, than she burst into a fit of weeping, of which she in vain asked herself the cause. "I don't pity *him;* for if he *is* disappointed, he only has what he deserves! I can't pity myself for possessing a knowledge which hinders me from perhaps uniting myself for life with a man whom I should, too late, discover to be all that I have reason to believe him—an adulterer, a deceiver, the corrupter—perhaps also the fickle deserter—of her who was my dearest friend—a man systematically hardened in vice!"

She, as it were intentionally, gave the strongest names to all the evil she thought of Langton, in order to guard against any wavering in the conviction that she had acted rightly in her absolute rejection of him. But the look—the tone with

which his last words to her had been spoken, returned to her eyes, rung in her ears, as she walked, now quickly, now with lingering steps, up and down the shadowy walk, till, wearied out, and more unfit than ever to face Mrs. Langton, she sat down on a bench at the extremity farthest from the house. There she remained till twelve had struck; nor could she, till long after, prevail on herself to rise from it, and try her courage by moving a little more in the direction of the house, under the large trees which helped to form the partition between the garden and orchard. She dried her tears, but felt that her eyes—her whole face—must be red and swollen; she thought that one other turn might tend to give the colour in her cheeks more the appearance of natural heat from exercise; and as she proceeded once again towards the filbert walk, she met, coming straight towards her from some of the back premises, Spencer Langton.

"Miss Desborough!" exclaimed he, in a manner which showed he was not only surprised to come across her there, but struck by the expression of her countenance. "I don't know why I should wonder at meeting you," he went on, as if correcting himself; "but I fancied you were more likely to be in the house."

"I was going there—am going there presently at least," answered she in a hesitating manner, which he seemed to observe, and stood lingering for a moment as in doubt whether to say more;

but when she turned to recommence her walk, he said hastily:

"There is nothing to prevent your going in, Miss Desborough. I mean that Oswald is already gone; and you had really better not tire yourself by staying out too long."

She tried to say something expressive of her regret that his brother's visit should have been curtailed, but spoke so unconnectedly, that if Spencer Langton understood her meaning, it must have been mainly by guess.

"It was of course impossible he should stay here longer," returned he, rather stiffly, "and there is no occasion to distress yourself for the cutting short of his visit on *my* account, as I trust it may be one day renewed; but . . . ." and he here cast a sort of inquiring look on her glazed cheeks, "is it possible that . . . ? No, there can hardly have been a *misunderstanding* between you and Oswald?"

"No, I believe we understood each other perfectly," was her answer.

"So I had supposed from the few words that passed between us when he bid me good-bye, just now; only—only—I fancied for a moment . . . . but of course you know best what is likely to prove for your happiness."

She made no reply, and they proceeded together towards the house, in the porch of which she stopped, to inquire whether his wife knew the reason of her brother-in-law's sudden departure.

"No, not the *reason;* she knows he is gone; he just told her something about 'business,' which obliged him to return to Shadworth. Would you prefer her not knowing?"

"I should, if it be possible, that is—; for though she is so kind—still I am not sure that . ."

"I perfectly understand," interrupted Spencer, "perfectly; and will volunteer nothing; so she *may* not find out—for some days at least. After you have left us, it will signify less, I conclude; and I think she must discover it in time, especially as—I should not wonder if *he* went abroad again—for this is a thing he will not soon get over. His impressions, when taken, are apt to be lasting."

She thanked him, being sincerely grateful for his willingness to spare her his wife's curiosity and investigations; retired to her own room for a short time, and then accounted for silence and paleness on the score of a headache, which was really beginning to make her temples throb and her forehead burn. It was fortunately taken as the concluding effect of yesterday's storm; and she received advice, to which she most readily yielded, "to keep herself quiet all that afternoon." Next day she heard many wonderings about Oswald's departure, and speculations on the probability or improbability of his returning in a day or two, combined with a rather incongruous mixture of praise and criticism on his person, manners, and disposition. But it was plain that Spencer

Langton had told nothing, and Katherine made up her mind patiently to endure the weariness and restraint of the remainder of her visit, esteeming herself fortunate if she could escape the additional torment of being for ever asked by her hostess "why she had refused Oswald?" It was bad enough to read an unspoken reproach in the increased melancholy of his brother Spencer's face; and the words, "I shouldn't wonder if Oswald went abroad again," recurred to her by day and by night. Cecilia too—if her hopes and fears for her favourite brother were in truth such as Alicia had represented—how would *she* feel on hearing what had come to pass? "Will she—can she forgive me? Am I sure myself that I have done right in refusing to grant the help he implored of me, in his self-accusing speech in Paris? What if he indeed looked on me—I believed it *then*—as the earthly guide, who might lead his steps into the straight path? Have I done well in sending him back to the society—to the habits which . . . ." But to all these considerations one answer came—"Knowing what I know—believing what I believe—I would not, I could not have done otherwise! He loves me, I doubt not; but dare I take the office of his guide? *I*, who ought rather to seek for the protection of one who would be *my* guide to all that is good—if I could find such!"

Katherine Desborough had acted as she had determined to act if given the opportunity. Her

resolution had been taken in the park of St. Cloud; she now strengthened her own conviction of the rectitude of her purpose, by recalling all she had listened to on that stone bench; and she steadied her mind, by compelling it to the acknowledgment of guilt she would not extenuate by giving it any milder name. The days wore away—however wearily—and brought at last the hour of her being fetched home to Wyngate. She found Lewis Markham gone; her uncle Desborough still there; and she neither regretted the absence of the one nor the presence of the other.

CHAPTER VII.

IF the mortification of being refused is necessarily and under all circumstances a keen one, it is doubly so for a man who has considered himself warranted in hoping, not to say expecting, a far other reception to his suit. Oswald Langton had in Paris flattered himself that the heart he desired to gain was already half won; he had since indeed wavered in that impression; but it had returned on him anew upon hearing that Katherine was at his brother's; had been confirmed by some particulars which had unintentionally escaped Cecilia during his brief sojourn at home; and had been wrought almost into conviction through the visible emotion, the conscious looks, of her he loved, while in his company at the Moat, previously to his declaration. That declaration had been cut short even before it was fully uttered; and although no unbecoming arrogance had marred the dignity of the refuser's bearing, still a more distinct, a more steady and more thorough refusal could hardly be given from woman to man. No doubt had been cast on the affection which he deemed warm and deep enough to deserve acknowledgment if not requital; it was

simply unheeded, unappreciated, and in the frame of mind in which he left his brother's house, anger, and a vexed sense of having received unmerited disdain, had fully as large a part, as grief at the downfall of the dearest hopes he had ever cherished. The possibility of a hostile influence having worked against him, had been disclaimed; and, ignorant as he was that any in Paris had coupled *his* name in scandalous import with that of Lady Carew, the real motive for his rejection was the last he would have guessed at. It followed that he could lay the blame of his ill success on no extraneous person or circumstance; Kate Desborough's heart was too cold or too haughty to value his; there was nothing to be done or to be looked for; and the farther and swifter he could fly from her presence, the better. His first resolution was to quit England, literally without delay; but, though it was not exactly the case that "business with his father" was taking him thus suddenly from the Moat, he *had* some, of various kinds, which obliged him to spend a couple of days at home before leaving it for an indefinite time. Thus compelled to revisit Shadworth, he thanked Heaven as he drew near it for the reserve which had, when he was last there, checked his impulse to confide what filled his mind to Cecilia, and which now left him free to avoid the making of confessions, the receiving of pity. Whether he judged well for his own peace in adopting a system which at once tried his powers of endurance to an extent he had hardly calculated

on, and cut him off from the sympathy of the sister he loved so entirely, may be doubted. He adhered to it, however; preferring a line of conduct which not only obliged him to shut up in his soul the grief that consumed it, but also made him appear unkind and unfeeling in the eyes of those to whom he now announced "that he was going to travel in Germany, finding it would never do for him to spend the summer in England as he had proposed." He saw that his father was deeply disappointed, and that his sister, though she said but few words, and shed no tears (in his presence at least), was cast down and afflicted, to a degree he had seldom before witnessed. But he was persuaded that no one could be so miserable as himself; and he therefore thought he was at liberty, irrespectively of any other consideration, to obey the feverish eagerness which drove him to set the sea, as speedily as might be, between himself and that proud damsel, who scorned the love, in the strength and truth of which he had deemed he must prevail. On the night before his quitting Shadworth, Cecilia did indeed make a slight effort to detain him, by speaking of her anxiety with regard to her father's health, of the weight of responsibility which the absence of all her brothers threw on her; but Oswald only answered by observing, "that he had not seen his father looking so well for years," and by exhorting her not to alarm herself needlessly. She refrained, therefore, from urging anything farther on one who

seemed so determined to lead his life at a distance from his family; who could not even endure ten days on end in his own country, and with whom she feared that any use made of the word "duty" would be utterly wasted. Nevertheless, when her brother said to her, just two minutes before his departure, "You don't know how I hate going now it comes to the moment!" her feeling changed, and she exclaimed:

"Why should you go?"

"I must—I must; it's out of the question staying," replied he, in a half sad, half impatient tone; "but if it were not for my father, who couldn't well stand a rapid tour at this time of day, and must not be left alone neither, what would I not give to take you with me!"

"That's a joke, Oswald, I think," said she, shaking her head, with a half smile.

"No joke, upon my honour," answered he, looking steadily at her; "it is the thing of all others I should like best. As to staying here—don't think me unkind—it's what I can't do; an indescribable, irresistible force seems to hurry me to the ends of the earth—if I strove against it I should go mad. But there's my father, and there are the horses! I must spend two days in London; so let me find a letter at Dover, to tell me how you are here, before I sail."

The letter to Dover was promised, the farewells were exchanged with an emotion, on the part of the traveller, which seemed inconsistent with the

hard obstinacy he displayed in action, and he quitted his family as thoroughly dissatisfied with his own conduct as with his prospects. He had scarcely turned his back on Shadworth than he called himself cold-hearted, unfeeling, ungrateful, for having denied his confidence to Cecilia; but when, on reaching London, he thought for a moment of writing to her that which he had forborne from saying, he recoiled from the undertaking, and contented himself with considering "that she would be sure to know before long, through Spencer, what had passed at the Moat, and when she did, she would understand and forgive him."

Yet it did occur to him sometimes that instead of being appeased, Cecilia might be only the more hurt, on learning how easily her brother could, by a few words, have avoided the appearance of treating her and his father with such capricious —almost insolent—indifference and changefulness. Then he wished he could fly back for a quarter of an hour to Shadworth; but the next minute he thought things were, perhaps, best as they stood, and gave himself up anew to the one aim of deadening grief in the hurry of rapid and constant change of place; (for the desire of novelty, as regarded company, he was not yet sufficiently cooled down). He arrived, therefore, at Dover in as much anxiety to cross the Channel within that hour, as if he had been the bearer of despatches, on the prompt arrival of which the fate of nations

depended. But before he had ascertained the precise minute when he might quit that native earth on which he had leaped with such delight not ten days back, the following letter was delivered to him.

"MY DEAR OSWALD,

"When I spoke to you, two nights ago, of my anxiety about my father's health, I was far from anticipating that he would, the very next evening, be seized with sudden illness of a nature similar to that which attacked him nearly a year ago, only so much more violent in degree, that I was for some hours without hope of his living to this morning. The worst symptoms seem now to be somewhat abating; but Mr. Foster appears to think it his duty not to allow me to fancy the danger over! 'After a few days have gone by,' he says, 'we may feel more of security; but such changes occur, from hour to hour, that it does not yet do to look forward hopefully;' and I feel I ought to repeat his opinion to you as it was given, in order that you may know the amount of what is to be feared. Lewis Markham has written to Spencer, and to Alexander (we are not certain of Henry's present address, as he spoke in his last of leaving Venice); till they come, I am sure of receiving from him every help and service it is in his power to afford me. He was here before seven this morning, and has ever since been writing letters or saving me trouble in some manner or other. Should I receive

no answer to this, I shall conclude it arrived too late; but I am addressing another to the 'Poste Restante' at Brussels, in the chance of *that* reaching you. I have no more to add, except that my father is sensible, though retaining scarcely strength enough to utter an occasional whisper. If it were possible for you to retrace your steps hither, I believe that nothing in this world could bestow so much gratification on him. I say nothing in that respect of your affectionate sister,

"CECILIA LANGTON."

There was not a moment's doubt or hesitation as to how he was to act now; what his sister said, and what she did not say, alike moved him to such a feeling of there being a neglect to repair, an evil to deprecate, that the longing to fly "to the ends of the earth," from that part of it at least which was trodden by Kate Desborough's feet, gave place at once to an absorbing dread of being desired in vain by his father in his last moments, and of being misjudged and blamed by his sister, perhaps for ever. There was in her letter a stiffness, a want of the easy flow which was usually characteristic of her communications to him, even when on the gravest subjects, which showed plainly how she had felt his demeanour, and his unexplained and unexpected departure. He determined now to avow his motives for both, at whatever cost; and he made every haste which the then mode of travelling allowed, to find himself at Shadworth,

where he accordingly arrived about the middle of the next day. His anxiety increased to a painful intensity during the last stages of his journey; and when, on reaching the gate of the approach which led to the house, he caught sight of his youngest brother, it was all he could do to bring out the words, "Am I too late, Alexander?"

"Too late!—oh, I understand," replied the youth. "I see, you have been frightened out of your wits, and brought home again by an insane letter of poor dear Cecy's! The truth is—I dare-say I seem a great brute for laughing—but the governor's as well—I don't say as ever he was—but quite as well as he was for a long while last year—after that attack you know—I don't believe this was an atom worse, for all the long faces they make; and Spencer is as lugubrious as Cecilia, though he was obliged to confess to-day that there was very fair hope of everything being quite right again before long."

"So my father's better, at all events," replied the elder brother, with an inward thankfulness, the expression of which was restrained by the careless manner of the younger; "and Spencer is here too," he continued; "how long is it since he came?"

"Why, I found him when I got here last night; I don't know exactly when he had arrived."

"And is my father sufficiently alive to what is going on to be aware of our having been sent for—of our being here?" asked Oswald, who, having

got out of the vehicle in which he had driven from Kingsford, was now walking towards the house with Alexander.

"I should think he was aware! and very particularly aware; for—I don't know how it may be about you, who are the standing favourite—but I can tell you, he wasn't best pleased that I should be had from Oxford before term's up, for any reason or pretext whatsoever! yet you know I couldn't do otherwise, getting such a letter as I did from Lewis Markham, who seems to have been Cecy's prime minister, or private secretary, till Spencer came."

"I am thankful she had any friend at hand," said Oswald, "and Markham is a good one; is he in the house now?"

"No—he just came to inquire to-day—he gave up his functions, I imagine, on Spencer's appearance; but the kind of letter he wrote, obliged me, you understand, to get into the first coach. If they had not made so much ado about nothing, *we* might have won the boat-race to-day, which I don't feel so sure of, now Tom Sadler takes my oar! but *that* can't be helped! So, having nothing better for it, I was just going over the way to Fenhurst, with my fishing-tackle; and as you will find the others within, I shall part company with you here."

CHAPTER VIII.

OSWALD walked into the house, where the first person he came across, in the hall, was an elderly man-servant, who exclaimed on seeing him:

"Well, I *am* glad to see you, sir! it will please Miss Langton so, and master too, though he hasn't said much about it."

"But your master is very much better, Mr. Alexander tells me," said Oswald.

"Why, yes, sir, if he wasn't better, and by a good deal, it would be all over by this time I reckon. We thought he was gone on Sunday night," added he, lowering his voice.

But before this colloquy had proceeded farther, a door opened, and Cecilia threw herself into her brother's arms with a passionate eagerness, very different from the quiet tenderness of her usual welcomes. He returned her embrace with affectionate warmth, and leading her back into the room whence she came, made her sit down on the sofa, while he said, as he placed himself beside her:

"My dear Cecy, I can't tell you how relieved I have been to hear that we *may* hope for a recovery."

"I trust indeed that we may, and I hope too,"

added she, while a painful expression contracted her features for a moment, "that you will not blame me, now you find things are so much better than I thought they ever could be when I wrote; but I feared the worst then, and I thought you might afterwards be sorry not to have been told, so that . . . ."

"My dear Cecilia," interrupted he, "I saw plainly by your letter, that you were tempted not to write it at all, but I thank God you overcame the temptation, and I'm glad to be here, Cecy, if it were only to say how I have reproached myself for being so morosely reserved with you when I was here last."

She pressed his hand warmly in token of forgiveness, and said after a pause, "I ought to tell you, Oswald, as my excuse for having been, as you say, tempted not to write, that I did not then know the reason of what *seemed* like caprice and unkindness; you know it was a thing I could not guess."

"Did it surprise you then?"

"Yes, exceedingly."

"What, that I should have been refused?"

"The fact itself does not astonish me as regards anyone."

"Then what did surprise you, Cecy? Was it that she should have been the refuser?" asked he eagerly.

"Why, I confess I had taken up the notion that things were exactly contrary to what they are; her

extreme emotion on seeing me at Wyngate, her unwillingness to speak of you, had struck me, and made me fancy that—that you had played with feelings you did not share, and that she . . . ."

"Was desperately in love with your cold-hearted monster of a brother?" asked he, with a bitter smile.

"I was all but persuaded of it," answered his sister.

"Well, it shows *I* was not the only fool," he observed. "But you say she exhibited great emotion on meeting you? and she is no actress, that much is certain."

"Most certain," assented his sister.

"And you have known her from childhood," added he, musingly. "But there is no use," he continued, "in attempting to fathom the meaning of what is probably connected at bottom with something neither you nor I have means of knowing; for nothing could be more deliberate than her decision, which even anticipated my address to her."

"And yet how strange," said Cecilia, "that Spencer (from whom, as you have probably guessed, I heard the story) should have found her in a flood of tears an hour after you and she had parted!"

"It *is* strange," repeated her brother, more than once, with increasing vehemence of tone and restlessness of gesture. At last he rose, and said, as he walked up and down the room, "I

wouldn't flatter myself for the world—for the universe; it would be like being put on the rack a second time; and *you* wouldn't flatter me, I know; but, though I can't say I was ever in the situation before—not having given anyone else the opportunity of so favouring me—it did strike me that her way of doing the thing, for all its deliberation and decision, was yet—I can't tell how—not what I should have fancied natural in a woman who *disliked* the man she was refusing; it seemed rather as if she were forcing herself!"

"But why should she?" asked Cecilia; "and it is fair to say, for fear of misleading you, that on perceiving Spencer's amazement at the state he found her in, she took care to let him know that there had been no mistake; that you and she perfectly understood each other."

"You are right to tell me that," said her brother, compelling himself to outward calmness, "quite right; and I see now that, attached to you as she is, she may have been simply annoyed (and grieved too) at having had to refuse a brother of yours; and it was probably a presentiment of that, which caused her peculiarity of manner on meeting you. She knew I meant to follow her to England, and felt awkward and embarrassed with you. I have said now all I care to say about the matter, and you won't recur to it, I am sure, Cecy. Only I wish you would write to *her* as soon as you can, to prevent there being any misunderstanding as regards *you*. I don't know if anything could vex

me more thoroughly than the idea that any action of mine should lead to estrangement between you and your Wyngate friends."

"I *have* written," replied Cecilia, "in answer to a very kind note I received from her this morning, upon my father's illness. I had not heard from any of them for some time; and I rather think she was glad, in one sense, of the opportunity of showing me kindness and interest; and I, you see, have done my best to prove that mine towards her are undiminished."

As she was saying these words, the door was opened by Spencer, who, after shaking hands with his brother, told him that his father was now aware he was come, and wished to see him. Old Mr. Langton was, as had been represented, in a terrible state of helpless weakness, but yet fully able to show, by countenance and a few hardly audible words, the joy that pervaded him at the scarce expected sight of his best beloved son.

"You stay over to-morrow, Oswald?" inquired the old gentleman, feebly, though with an anxious, perturbed look, which bore witness to his sharing his daughter's fear lest the summons home should have been unwillingly obeyed.

"Till over to-morrow, sir!" replied the son; "I mean to stay at least till you are well and about again! I was much too precipitate the other day in fancying I couldn't get through the summer here; for in truth it is far pleasanter travelling abroad when the hot weather is over."

"I'm glad of it," murmured Mr. Langton, "it's too much for Cecilia at times like these to be alone; and Spencer oughtn't to be away from where his business is."

Oswald expressed his entire agreement with his father's opinion; and hoped he had completely driven away what mental anxieties might be interfering with the invalid's tranquillity, when he unluckily chanced to make mention of his brother Alexander. The name awakened a most disagreeable train of thought in Mr. Langton's mind, and he roused himself out of his state of motionless exhaustion to talk, with more energy than could be beneficial to him, of his youngest son's debts, of the company he kept at College, and of the needlessness of sending for him home, etc.

Oswald did what he could to soothe this excitement, but was beginning to fear some ill effect from it, when to his great comfort Cecilia came in, to tell her father that she was desired not to allow him above ten minutes at a time with anybody who let him talk, and to send *him* away to seek Spencer, who was standing on the steps of the hall door. On joining him he was surprised to see at some little distance, but advancing towards them from the outer gate, the worshipful Alexander himself, fishing-rod in hand still, and wearing a very disconsolate visage.

"His sport hasn't been long," observed one brother to the other.

"Nor good either," was the answer, "and he

looks mightily as if he had been 'warned off,' though that can't well be the case."

By this time he was near enough to exclaim, before any question was put to him:

"You are wondering what brings me back, and well you may! What do you think of old Markham being dead of apoplexy?"

"Dead!" cried both his brothers at once.

"Why, Lewis left him quite well this morning when he came here to inquire!" said Spencer.

"That's very true," replied Alexander; but it's not the less true that he fell down dead, about an hour before I got to Fenhurst. So everything was in confusion there, and the gardeners and people looked as if I was, of course, to turn back on hearing what had happened—not that my catching a fish or two could have disturbed a living soul, or a dead one either; but as I stood thinking whether I should not go my own way, without caring how they looked, there came a message to me from Lewis, about not being able to see me, and hoping I would tell you what had happened, which showed plainly I wasn't meant to stay; so here I am, and you know as much as I do."

"How strange it seems," said Spencer, "that old Markham—as we have been used to call him, though I believe he was barely fifty-five—seeming so likely to live twenty or thirty years more, should

have gone in this manner, before my father, who, forty-eight hours back, was not expected to exist from one ten minutes to another! I wonder whether he has left anything to Lewis!"

"If he had made a will, I should think he probably had," observed Oswald, "for though only a distant relation by blood, he was his uncle by marriage; and I have often heard him say Lewis was much more a nephew to him than Charles Markham, who is returning from Canada now, little thinking of what he, I suppose, will come into on arriving."

"Well," said Alexander, "if old Markham meant to do anything for Lewis, it was very shabby of him not to say so at once, instead of letting him go off to be broiled alive in India."

"When Lewis Markham first went to India, ten years ago, his uncle had not the large property he inherited afterwards," replied Oswald; "but *I* think a man is very lucky in being brought up to expect nothing, and in being set to work while he is fit for it. I know I heartily wish there had been no better prospects to prevent my going off to India when I was your age."

"Do you?—well, may be; but you didn't wish it much then, or you would have gone, I suppose. Only just don't put that bright notion into the governor's head for my benefit, please, Oswald."

So saying, he departed, leaving his brothers to shrug their shoulders, and declare their determination never, if they could help it, to interfere

one way or another in the affairs of "Master Alexander."

"Well, one comfort is, you will be quit of him to-morrow, for a time at least," said Spencer to Cecilia after dinner, as they walked up and down the verandah together, when Oswald had betaken himself to his father's room, and the interesting individual alluded to had disappeared in quest of a novel, over which he was yawning himself to sleep.

"Alexander has such a knack of saying the wrong thing, that I almost think I ought to have given him a hint of how the land lies! But then, on the other hand, he has such a boyish love of mischief, and so little comprehension of other people's feelings, that one doesn't know which way to deal with him. And how could one guess he would take it into his head to go on, as he did about his visit to the Humes, and the rise and progress of his acquaintance with that brother of Kate Desborough's, who, for a young gentleman under eighteen, would appear to be as promising a specimen of the genus scamp as ever I heard tell of! I tried to keep him to the Humes, and their dog-kennel, and George Hume's accident at the Allington steeple-chase, but no—back to the Desboroughs he always came again—Kate Desborough's fortune, Kate Desborough's age, and the pity it was she was too old to be 'Mrs. Alexander!' I don't know when I have felt so annoyed; it was awkward enough, Heaven knows, to sit three days at breakfast and dinner at the

Moat, with that girl, after the Tuesday's doings, and Alicia knowing nothing about it, but this was fifty times worse! The whole affair has been such a terrible blow to Oswald—I can't wonder at it either, taking all things into consideration. And then it is somehow so provokingly inexplicable!—the girl so frank and honest—warm-hearted, too, I believe—to go and refuse him in that cool, determined way, when one would have said she was dying of love for him! At least, that was my opinion from the moment I saw them together!"

"It is very strange," observed Cecilia, "and the disappointment it brings about is as afflicting as it is strange; such a marriage with such a girl would have been everything for him! It had been my day-dream—I may confess it now! and after knowing how constantly they had met in Paris, and after seeing her at Wyngate, I thought, when he left us for the Moat, that my hopes were on the point of being realized! It would have been the turning point in his life; and now . . . ."

"And now," repeated Spencer, "I fear he will be more unsettled than ever; when once the wound is scarred over, that is, which it will not be in a hurry. It's a dismal business for him, for you, for all of us; and I can tell you, Cecy," continued he with a half smile, "that, putting more serious matters out of sight, it has brought *me* my full share of tribulations! You know I promised the girl to keep what had passed to myself; she wished it, and I really did not see—for

as angry as I was with her for refusing Oswald —why things should be made more unpleasant to her than they needed, so I held my tongue (in spite of all the wonderings, and 'wishings to know when Oswald would be back again' that I was assailed with) till our guest was fairly gone. Then I spoke; and then Alicia was so dreadfully hurt at what she called 'my want of confidence in her,' that she wept for the remainder of the day, and a considerable part of the night, too! I believe that, to be just, I ought to say it was not only the 'want of confidence' that afflicted her so terribly, for she fancies that *if* she had 'known in time,' things might have taken another turn, which she is the more confident of, because, it seems, she once brought a cousin of hers to reason, and to the rescinding of a decision unfavourable to a remarkably amiable young man, who happened, luckily, to be still on the premises while the discussion for and against was going on, and so was 'within call' when it was over. But you see *there* was the difference! Oswald was *not* 'within call;' and though I shall think to my dying day that the 'No' might have been turned into 'Yes,' if I could have conjured him into my place when I met Kate Desborough in such a state, I doubt that Alicia's unassisted eloquence would have prevailed. She says 'girls have so little idea of what will make them happy,' and I am pretty much of her opinion; only I don't think she could have remedied the fact in this case! She actually

wanted to petition Mrs. Lancefield for the loan of her carriage to take her to Wyngate, and see what she could effect there! That, however, I absolutely forbade; and I only hope I shall find her a little calmer on the subject when I get home; for when I left her, her state of excitement was what a bystander might have thought rather droll; though it was no laughing matter to me, I assure you. By the way, Cecy, what was it gave *you* such an inclination to laugh, while Alexander was talking all that rubbish at dinner? For in spite of your looking so annoyed and worried, I saw the corners of your mouth moving every now and then, and I could not guess what on earth was amusing you."

"What made me smile," returned Cecilia, "was the odd coincidence between Alexander's talking so coolly of Kate Desborough—as if it only stood with him to 'take possession'—and her mother's dread of *his* possibly making himself too agreeable to her."

"The notion of Alexander's being too agreeable to Kate Desborough! that *is* good!" exclaimed Spencer.

"Good or bad, it is true," said his sister, "and I never could have her to stay with me here, because her uncles were afraid of Lewis Markham, on the one hand, and Mrs. Oakly of Alexander on the other."

"Have she and Alexander ever met?" asked Oswald, whom they now perceived, somewhat to

their surprise, standing in the window of the drawing-room, which he had entered a minute or two before.

"No, never," answered his sister.

"But she does know Markham?"

"Certainly, he is a cousin of her step-father's."

"Well—if *he* has her, she won't be thrown away," returned he, and left the window abruptly.

"Hitherto, at least," observed Cecilia to Spencer, in an undertone, "there has seemed little chance of that either; but we had better go into the house now, and ask Oswald how he found my father."

Next day, Alexander returned to Oxford; and the day after, as Mr. Langton continued to amend steadily though slowly, Spencer also left Shadworth for the Moat.

CHAPTER IX.

"How had the deceased Mr. Markham left his property? Would the nephew he had always designated as his heir, come to reside at Fenhurst? or would the widow remain possessed of it during her life? What had he left to the distant kinsman, his nephew by marriage, but almost his son by adoption? Or had he left him anything at all?"

These were questions by which the Shadworth neighbourhood, like all country neighbourhoods on similar occasions, was deeply agitated, till such time as—after many contradictory rumours—it became known, with tolerable certainty, that Charles Markham's return to England, now to be looked for in a few days, would not interfere with Mrs. Markham's residence at Fenhurst Court; and farther, that Lewis Markham was entitled, under his relation's will, to a legacy, equal in amount to that bequeathed to the testator's nephew by blood, the younger brother of the heir. It was not large enough, as he said to Oswald Langton, to make him think of giving up his intention of returning to India, where he had occupation and duties, not to speak of hopes of advancement, of which there

was little prospect at home, but was a great blessing as being sufficient to prevent his feeling himself forced to remain in a trying climate, should his health prove really unequal to it.

"It is a singular thing," added he, "that I have had more than one letter from friends who suppose me to be the heir; but I don't know after all why I should call it singular, for as I was certainly in one sense a nephew, and am also a Markham, it is not very surprising that people who don't know much about us should make the mistake, especially as some of our neighbours here chose to fancy the same thing, with no better foundation than my being mentioned in the will as next in succession, 'failing Charles' and 'failing George,' both younger than myself."

There was perhaps nothing singular in the reports, but it *did* appear a remarkable instance of the "freaks of fortune," when they in substance came true. Ten days had not elapsed since Mr. Markham's sudden death, when the vessel by which Charles Markham was expected, arrived, bearing with it the intelligence of *his* death, caused by a fall, during some rough weather they had experienced shortly after putting to sea. A week more, and it appeared that the younger brother, who was travelling with some friends in the north of Italy, had been seized with a fever which cut short his existence even before the news of his illness reached England. It thus befell that the distant cousin, and nephew by marriage only, to

the late possessor of Fenhurst Court, whose name had been inserted in the will, chiefly to bar all chances of succession against certain nearer kinsmen, objectionable to the testator, did, within three weeks, become his heir. The progress of these events was watched with great interest by Mr. Langton, who, gradually regaining health, without as yet returning to active pursuits, was correspondingly engrossed (when not brooding over his annoyances about Alexander) by the posthumous affairs of his late neighbour. His being so engrossed was rather a relief to his daughter, who, fearing lest the duty of attending on, and of conversing with his father, might prove too great a strain upon one in Oswald's present mood, was glad when the talk was of a nature she could take upon herself. With her brother, whose gloomy dejection (when alone with her) remained unabated, she strictly adhered to the rule he had requested her to observe; and the walks and rides they began to take together, as their father's state required less and less attendance, were silent enough, except when Alexander's concerns, and the expediency or inexpediency of retaining him at the University, were being discussed between them. In her own mind Cecilia was frequently occupied by another consideration—namely, whether now that her father's health was so nearly re-established, she ought or ought not to propose Oswald's fulfilling his old intention of travelling for a time. Was it best for him (she put herself out of the question)

to endure, in the monotony of his home life, the bitterness of a sorrow he could not bear to touch on, or to seek to divert that sorrow by the rapid change of place and of scene, which forces the mind out of itself, and brings it to something like forgetfulness of its inward burdens? She could not decide; and moreover, the secret—though unacknowledged—hope, which every now and then disposed her to believe that Katherine was better inclined to her brother than she would allow, helped to restrain her from saying the word, without which she saw he would remain at his present post.

One evening, something more than a month after the news of Mr. Langton's dangerous illness had brought his son home, Cecilia was sitting in the window, working, or with her work on her lap rather, for she was visibly absorbed by her reflections.

"You and I are thinking of the same thing, Cecy," said Oswald, drawing near, but looking from her as he spoke; "you are thinking of the conclusions my father drew at dinner from Markham's visit to Wyngate, and from his being so desirous of going off there to-morrow, as to have begged me to do those little matters of business for his aunt in his absence. It was no great favor to ask; but he would not have left Fenhurst and his aunt so immediately upon his change of prospects without a motive—and—my father has guessed it. How often it happens that bystanders, who care not a straw, get a clearer insight into

what is going on, than the principals who have pondered over it till their brain goes round! I see it all plain enough now! But it was not to say that, not *only* to say that at least, that I began to speak; it was that you might hear me tell you—tell you deliberately—that I believe Lewis Markham deserves her; and if she loves him, and cares not for me, she is right enough, though I don't think he can prize her more. This explains why she was—I understand it now—so honorably determined to let me know her mind the moment she suspected my intention; and if she marries Markham, it will be through an old preference, not because the present suitor has become a richer man than the former one."

"You will go off to Germany, as soon as he comes back from Wyngate, I conclude?" asked his sister, after a pause of some moments.

"That very day, that very hour," said he, eagerly, "unless," he added, as if correcting himself with an effort, "unless any drawback in my father's health should make me feel doubtful about leaving you alone."

"I shan't be alone, soon," replied Cecilia, "for you know Alexander left Oxford a fortnight ago, and his visit to the Humes will be over before long."

"Alexander is as good as nothing—worse than nothing—for he is always keeping you on tenterhooks, and is of no use whatever when one really wants help of any kind. I trust all may go on as

favorably as we have reason to hope now; but you have been too much left to do duty for all the rest of us. The truth is I oughtn't to go at all; and I believe it is sheer weakness to contemplate it."

"Indeed, Oswald, I hope you will not fancy that, for, if things really are as we suppose, I should be sorry to keep you here! Only I should like to be able to look forward to some time when we might expect you back, and not fear that you had grown weary of England altogether."

"Weary of England!" repeated he, "I have longed and pined for it before now—shall long and pine for it again, when next I cross the water! But the fact is there are many things it is easier to forget there than here."

"I suppose so," replied his sister; "but putting out of the question the relief and distraction afforded by total change of place and company, which may be legitimately sought for under some circumstances, is it well or wise *always* to strive to forget what presses upon us in any manner?"

"I don't know about the always," answered he; "but having tried a life that was most unsatisfactory in England, I—not unnaturally—thought to see if, for one situated like me, there might be something more satisfactory elsewhere; it appeared so at first; though I can't say it has ended any better."

Oswald had never spoken so much of himself and of his feelings since the day of his arrival; but he either would not trust himself to say more,

or else he did not wish his sister to say more to him; for he turned away and walked out into the verandah, from whence he afterwards proceeded to the garden. Cecilia took up her work again, for it was still light, though the sun had already set; and thought of the perverseness of men and fate, till the dusk began to come on. She remembered the visits to Mrs. Tynedale, on which Oswald might have accompanied her—*then* at least Kate Desborough had been "fancy-free." But *then* the very man, who would now give half his existence to make that heart his own, disdained to go in quest of such opportunities. Did he remember how he had had them, and thrown them away?

Something more than a week passed over the inmates of Shadworth without anything occurring to break the even tenor of their way; Alexander was still at the Humes'; Mr. Langton rapidly improving in health; Cecilia occupied as usual with her household, her garden, her books, and her poor neighbours; and Oswald employed in the mornings in getting through arrears of accounts, and business letters of his father's which had accumulated during his illness, while he spent the afternoons either in long solitary walks, or else in rides with Cecilia, which he did not enliven by any particular endeavour at conversation. She saw that he was growing restlessly impatient, and that if it had not been for his engagement to be ready to make himself useful to Mrs. Markham, he would have

hurried away, without waiting for the "announcement" of an event he evidently looked forward to as to a certainty. One morning she perceived that the sight of a letter, directed to her, and stamped with the name of the Wyngate Post Town, perturbed him considerably; and after waiting till his father had left the room, he came up to her, saying, "If Markham and Kate Desborough are engaged, tell me so at once!"

"I can't tell you so, for I don't think they are," answered she, "for he has left Wyngate already, Mrs. Oakly says."

"Then it's from her you are hearing! I thought she never wrote."

"No more she does in general; and this letter is not the clearest that ever was composed; though it says distinctly that he (Lewis Markham) is gone, not back to Fenhurst, but to some friends near Scarborough, which would be singular, if things were as we imagined."

"It would, I own; but has this lady 'who never writes,' indited that long epistle solely to inform you that Markham spent a week there instead of a fortnight?"

"No," replied Cecilia, "not solely; she writes because she 'wishes *exceedingly* to see me;' and—though she doesn't say why—appears to attach a great deal of importance to it. The rest consists of prefaces and apologies for asking me to leave my father, which she wouldn't do if she had not

heard that he was so much better, and that my eldest brother was at home now, etc., etc."

"And what do you mean to do, Cecy?" enquired Oswald, who, though he would not have acknowledged it, now showed, by his look and manner, that he was a good deal relieved.

"I mean to go certainly—I think it would look unkind to refuse when I am so much pressed. Then there are other reasons too; for I feel as if by spending a few days there, I might come to understand some things which—in short, it would be a satisfaction to my mind—and perhaps to yours also, Oswald—if I could go. I only hope my father will not take it into his head he can't spare me."

"Oh no, he won't, Cecy—I'll see to that—I can manage everything for him that he really wants now; you know he was even talking of taking a ride to-morrow."

"Yes, Oswald; but it's fair to tell you, if you *do* undertake the sole charge of looking after and attending to my father, that it will be for more than a week. Mrs. Tynedale has returned from Buxton now; so if I go to Wyngate, I *must* offer myself to her, for I can't feel so sure, as I did, of being able to go there in the autumn. While *I* am here you are to a certain degree your own master, are not obliged to give up your time so entirely as if I were away. Can you submit to it for as much as ten days—perhaps longer?"

"My dear Cecy," returned he, "say no more

about it, but accept. I don't build much upon your learning anything at Wyngate—anything gratifying, I mean—but good or bad, one would rather know exactly how one stands; and if you do that for me, I should be a sad ungrateful dog if I grudged doing a little duty to help you to do yours by that kind old woman, whom I have not seen since—I can't tell when—but I know it is so long ago that I am ashamed to think of it!"

Mr. Langton did not make any opposition. He made none, at least, that his son was not able to overcome easily enough to put it in Cecilia's power to assure Mrs. Oakly, by return of post, that, if all continued well, she hoped to be with her at the time proposed. She was glad when it was settled, and glad also that her brother was not in the room when she, next day, received the following note from Katherine.

"I found yesterday, my dear Cecilia, that mamma had written to invite you here, and I can't help adding a line to say how much *I* also hope that it may be in your power to accept. I know you will come if you can, though I am aware there may be difficulties; but if you are able to visit us, will you, dear Cecy, remember that mamma knows nothing of what happened at the Moat, and that I should be glad she continued ignorant of it? Will you also kindly allow me now, once for all, to say how grieved I should be if what there passed were to have the slightest effect upon the feelings with which you have kindly

regarded me from childhood? I owe to you some of the very happiest hours of my whole life, and I know no one who could replace you in the heart of your affectionate

"KATE DESBOROUGH.

"P.S.—Write no answer—at least not if you can come. Once here, I shall see *by your manner* that you have got this, for I am sure you will spare both yourself and me all spoken allusions to what could but be painful."

There was both warmth and tenderness in this letter; nevertheless it was rather a disappointment to Cecilia, and checked the progress of certain castles she had been involuntarily building during the last four and twenty hours, inasmuch as it showed her that she was expected not to name Oswald—almost "put upon honour" not to investigate the causes of his rejection. But this could make no difference in her arrangements, whatever it might in her hopes; and as her father continued improving in health and spirits, she left Shadworth on the Monday, saying to her brother as she bid him farewell, "that she should write to him next day."

"That will be just to tell us of your safe arrival," answered he, "for I don't expect anything more just at first."

"Something more" did, however, accompany the notification of "safe arrival," which appeared in due course of post; for, though it was written

precisely in the form of such, and was perfectly fit to meet Mr. Langton's eye, should he take a fancy to "see Cecy's note" himself, it contained the following postscript: "Tell my father that I am ready to think more of his penetration than ever; for Lewis Markham *did* come here with the intention of proposing to Kate, who, nevertheless, has absolutely and decidedly refused him. I learnt this before I had been five minutes in the house, from her mother, who is in despair about it. I need not say, either to you or to my father, that this piece of intelligence is not to go beyond your two selves."

The strange and growing sense of uncertainty as to what might be the real feelings of the woman who had refused him, had been replaced in Oswald's mind, during some days, by the belief that all resolved itself into the simple fact of her preferring another. That belief had again been somewhat shaken; nevertheless, it could not be but that the information conveyed by this letter, entirely of a negative description though it were, should agitate his heart with a vague impression that all was, perhaps, not so completely over between him and Kate Desborough. "For if," argued he with reviving hopefulness, "if she had refused both himself and Markham out of sheer indifference, or girlish fastidiousness, she might yet be won by whichever of them should have constancy and perseverance enough to stand by, on the watch for the first opportunity of renewing, without servility

or intrusiveness, the intercourse which a seemingly decisive explanation had interrupted. He has now become rich, and therefore has acquired her mother's good word," thought he. "He has, moreover, led an occupied and regular life, which I fancied might be a recommendation to *her*; but I see she can refuse a pattern man as well as an ordinary sinner; and if he has his wealth and her family to help him, I have Cecilia for my ally, and an obstinate heart and head to follow up every advantage that may open upon me, in the chase after her, of whom a kind friend once told me—as I yesterday thought too truly—that she would never take me, though I spent seven years in serving her, like the good knight Durandarte!"

CHAPTER X.

MR. Langton was—or had been rather—proud of Oswald's talents and attainments; but he was secretly disappointed that his son had never so used his gifts as to "make a figure in the world." The son, on the other hand, reflected with some inward bitterness, both on the careless extravagance which had crippled his father's fortune just as his children were entering into life, and also upon his having failed to perceive, in time, that an impoverished man, albeit of ancient descent and good connections, should not choose out the same path in life for his eldest son, as would have been suitable had he still retained the wealth which had long been hereditary in their family. Yet Oswald felt grateful for the easy kindness with which he had been invariably treated, and for the exceeding liberality—according to his means—which his father had displayed, and still displayed, in his dealings with him; while Mr. Langton, on the other hand, both in his heart, and in open words, was always ready to acknowledge his satisfaction in the son whom he had never had to help out of debt or out of difficulties, and who, as he expressed

it, "had never given him a moment's uneasiness." It followed therefore, that the intercourse between them had always been on an affectionate footing, though they were not so attached, or so situated, as to have ever become that exceptional thing, which occurs just often enough not to be pronounced impossible, namely, a "confidential father and son." Now as things stood, it was impossible, without this element of "confidence," that Oswald should experience actual pleasure in the duties imposed upon him by his sister's absence. He performed them, however, thoroughly; more thoroughly than might have been expected from a man who, used of late to a life diversified either by the incidents of travel, or the amusements of social life in foreign cities, found no escape, in the monotony of his present existence, from black care and unwelcome recollections. That existence had now become even more monotonous, as the actual business he had been doing for his father, was put an end to by the latter's gradually resuming his daily habits and occupations. Cecilia's absence, moreover, deprived him of the only companionship he was capable of enjoying; and for every reason he longed for her return with an intensity which rendered it difficult to him (although prepared for it) to learn with outward equanimity, by a short letter addressed to his father, that she *did* go to Mrs. Tynedale's, and would be away the full ten days she had expected. A combination of feelings had prevented him from writing to his sister while

at Wyngate (his father had taken upon himself the answering of her first note), but upon her removal to Mrs. Tynedale's, impatience prevailed, and he addressed a letter to her there, requesting her to give him, *before her return*, as exact and detailed an account as was in her power, of what she had seen and observed when at the Oakly's.

"Whatever it is," he said, "I should prefer to know it, and to have made up my mind to it, before you arrive. I believe, besides, that I am more likely to form a dispassionate judgment from a continuous narrative, and that you also are more likely to present an exact picture to me where you are, than when speaking to me of what you fear may give pain."

Cecilia's answer was as follows :—

"I believe you are right, my dear Oswald, and that in this instance it may be more in the power of my pen than of my tongue, to let you see, hear, and understand, as much as I do myself; though I believe I ought to begin by saying that—beyond the one fact of Kate's having refused a man, who, now that wealth has been added, may be said to possess every recommendation—I have nothing positively encouraging to relate. Her reception of me was as affectionate as ever, notwithstanding that there was also a certain embarrassment about it, which was visible to me—perhaps because I shared it. She did not follow me to my room, but her mother did; and after observing 'how glad she was of the opportunity of telling me

all the things that had oppressed her spirits since dear Kate's return,' sat with me a good hour, during which she bewailed, almost with tears, her daughter's 'childish ignorance of what was for her good.' 'She would be happier in a home of her own,' proceeded she; 'you know she will be twenty in October—and yet she refuses such an unexceptionable offer! I was annoyed at her not choosing to give a moment's consideration to Robert Hazelwood's proposal; but then it *is* true, that though everything that is desirable in other respects, he is not—not exactly—what Kate could look up to; but Lewis Markham—so clever, so superior . . . George says he really thinks the girl must be beside herself! And—what's very unfair—instead of being angry with *her*, and telling *her* his mind himself, he says it's all my fault, because . . . but you know . . . how could I do otherwise? I am sure I always liked Lewis Markham exceedingly myself, and was very sorry to have to send Kate away to the Moat—should never have done it if it hadn't been for Herbert Desborough; the dear girl seemed so loath to part from us all again so soon—and to leave Lewis Markham too, I thought—which was what frightened me so at the time! But doesn't it seem all the more perverse of her to refuse him now? And it isn't as if she even pretended to dislike him, or to think ill of him in any manner—that, indeed, she couldn't—he's so excellent every way, people tell me! George made sure, at first,

that Mr. Bell was at the bottom of it—the young man, you know, who takes the Sunday duty at the Church near the Moat—but she never met him but once, that we can make out; and, besides, we find now that he is engaged—will be married in the autumn, they say. If she would admit she had a preference, however misplaced, one might scruple urging the thing on her; but, dear Cecy, I feel so sure that she will repent when it is too late, that I do hope you may help her to find out how much more she agrees with us at heart than she thinks. I know you wish nothing so much as her real good, so I am sure you will come to my assistance, and do all in your power to lead her mind to right views!'

"I now began to understand why I had been 'so much wanted' at Wyngate; and—much disliking an office which, though I could not tell *her* so, it was impossible I should undertake heartily—I did my best to escape from it, by endeavouring to make Mrs. Oakly see, that however much a son-in-law like Lewis Markham may be to be regretted, there is no positive necessity for her daughter's being married this year. I was answered, however, as I have been many times before on that subject; and as on former occasions, so on this, I found it impossible to reason away Mrs. Oakly's exceeding desire to see her eldest daughter married, and thus be freed, till Annie grows up, from all the duties and obligations, which she acknowledges just enough to be worried by, without attempting

to fulfil them. This feeling has only increased; and I see that (provided she could do so without affronting the Desboroughs) she would now be content to bestow her daughter on a man who had not himself the fortune she used to talk of as a 'sine quâ non,' though of course Lewis Markham's present wealth forms a considerable item in her regrets. It all came back again, however, to the entreaty—'Would I do her the very great kindness of speaking to Katherine?'—which was, at last, so pressed upon me, that I could not in friendliness refuse; and I promised to do what she wished next day, though I at the same time warned her, 'that I would not urge *any* girl to marry unwillingly.' Mrs. Oakly seemed satisfied with this compromise, and left me to dress for dinner, at which meal I thought Kate talked more, and seemed to exert herself more to keep conversation alive, than on any of my former visits. I observed the same thing during the evening; but could not determine whether this change of manner proceeded from a desire to hide, under an outside of liveliness, the embarrassment my presence might occasion her, or whether it simply was, that having now seen more of the world, she had begun to acquire the power of bringing her sense and understanding forward in company, as well as in a 'tête-à-tête.' On the Tuesday morning, we found ourselves alone together for some time; and I so turned the conversation as to enable myself, after awhile, to comply with the mother's request, and

ask the daughter 'why she objected to Lewis Markham?'

"'Oh, mamma has been talking to you of that,' said she, slightly blushing; 'I rather expected she would, but took the chance she might not. The fact is I don't *object* at all to Lewis Markham; I think him as agreeable as I always did, I only object to marrying him.'

"'But that is what your mother can't understand,' returned I, 'for *she* thinks, that professing both to like and to esteem him, as you still do, you must mistake your own feelings.'

"'No Cecilia,' replied she, looking at me steadily, 'I do not mistake my feelings, nor should I have supposed that you would share the vulgar opinion that a girl *must* be so enchanted to marry any man, not utterly unpleasing or unworthy, that she can only refuse him through the kind of temporary delusion, insanity almost, which seems to be attributed to me.'

"I disclaimed the belief in any such 'necessity,' but said I so far partook of the common feeling, as to think it natural that a woman's liking for a man as sensible, as well-looking, and as generally pleasing as Lewis Markham, should be increased, not lessened, by the knowledge that she is preferred by him.

"'As a rule, that may be true,' said she, 'but there are exceptions to it, as to all others; is it marvellous that I should be one of them?'

"'Perhaps not,' replied I, 'and I should not,

believe me, Kate, have begun on this subject of myself.'

"'I do believe you?' cried she, warmly. 'I know it is only to please mamma that . . . .' she stopped, and then added; 'yet I am glad, too, that you have thought yourself obliged to talk about it! for though *I* should not, either, have said anything "of myself," it seemed strange to have you here and not speak of what has been producing such a commotion in the house, caused such discussions between mamma and me, tormented me so dreadfully! But now,' said she, in a more cheerful tone, 'you can tell mamma you have done her bidding, without any more argument with poor me.'

"'There is no need of argument,' resumed I; 'only I promised to ask—mind, I did not promise to bring back an answer—what reason you can have, or think you have, for making sure of *never* being able to love Lewis Markham?'

"Her cheeks flushed crimson as I spoke, but she said resolutely:

"'That means, have I a preference for another man? I don't mind answering you the question, Cecilia, though I am afraid I was sadly angry when mamma put it to me! I have not yet seen —I don't know if I ever shall see—the man to whom I should, in all respects, choose to bind myself for life. I have entered into very little society in this country; during the short time I

was in Paris, I met with few men, either foreign or English, who really pleased me in any sense; and'—she took a deep breath, and laid hold of my hand as she continued—'none have ever appeared to me so agreeable as Lewis Markham and—your brother, both of whom, as you know, I have refused.' She withdrew her hand from mine, leaned back in her chair, and I saw tears gathering in her eyes as she said, 'I do not repent of what I have done; I believe I was right; but it would grieve me terribly to be thought to have played a false game out of vanity; and I know I *did* say things to Lewis Markham when he was here before, about my vexation at going away, and about missing my chats with him, which might mislead him. I was so firmly persuaded that my uncle's dread of him, as a lover for me, was utterly nonsensical! But I cannot bear the notion that he, or that *anyone* should think himself deceived—drawn on—by me!'

"I observed that she was unlikely to be suspected of anything so unworthy by a man who knew her as well as Lewis Markham did; 'for,' I added, 'one who has *not* known you so early, or so long, is sensible of your thorough straightforwardness—acknowledges your superiority to every pettiness of vanity.'

"'I am glad of it—very glad,' said she, turning away her head, 'because, though it is only justice, yet the longer I live, the more plainly I see how little one can depend on getting *that*, even when

one has, however involuntarily, mortified or disappointed people. I wish mamma were not so very anxious I should marry! though, perhaps, I have myself contributed to make her so, by having seemed discontented with the life I led here! And it is in vain that I *now* say—what is really no more than truth—that I am quite content to live on just as I have always done, and want no change. They tell me I don't look contented! I can't help that, you know; but indeed, dear Cecy, though I am young, and in good health, possessing all that are called—and really are—the greatest blessings, I sometimes feel as if I were, for all that, weary of my life! I hope it is not very wicked—I am afraid it is, and I know I may be punished one day for not valuing, as I ought, the good things given me.'

"As she spoke she threw her arms round my neck, and burst into tears. I said what I could to soothe her, and she appeared gratified by the marks of affection I gave her, saying more than once, 'I am so glad you love me the same as ever.' By degrees her emotion subsided; she began talking to me, with interest, on less agitating topics; and I was glad to have got over the task imposed on me, without offending her. I could only report to her mother that I had failed in obtaining any of the light she hoped for, and endeavour, in my after intercourse with Kate, so to demean myself as that she should feel at ease with me, and conceive no suspicion that I might be watching her, or seeking

to fathom what passed in her mind on any subject not openly discussed between us. I have reason to think I was successful; for the next day, and all the following ones, we talked together as familiarly—as confidentially even, except upon one point—as we had ever done. Of her stay in Paris, of her intercourse with Lady Carew, of her observations on the society there, I heard little; nor was I surprised at it; for I knew that all these subjects must be connected, more or less, with what it was tacitly agreed between us to make no mention of. She talked freely of the Moat (of Spencer and Alicia I mean), discussed the character and prospects of her sister Annie and her brother Fred (Alexander's new friend), and also expressed to me her satisfaction on being at home again, after such a long absence from it, in a manner which bore witness to a considerable sobering of her mind, and views, during the four months that had elapsed since I had last listened to the outpouring of her complaints and aspirations, when on the eve of starting for the Continent. She appeared to me to have grown altogether a graver and an older person; when alone with me, that is—for even as before our conversation on the subject of Lewis Markham, so after it, I noticed that she took a good deal of pains, in public, to maintain a kind of cheerfulness which, to my feeling—and I believe to her mother's—seemed somewhat forced. She expressed the same kind regret as of old, when I left Wyngate, which, however, is so near

this place, that I cannot yet consider myself as having bid farewell to any of its inmates. We expect both Kate and Annie to pay us a visit this evening, if it continues fine; and I shall probably see her again, on some other occasion, before Thursday, which day still remains fixed for my return. And now, dear Oswald, I must bring my chronicle to a close. I have omitted nothing, however trifling, which bears—or even seems to bear—upon Kate's motives, both for the decision which is known to her family, and for that which is known only to ourselves. Her conduct appears equally mysterious to them, and to your affectionate sister

"CECILIA LANGTON."

Mr. Langton, who never thought the house thoroughly comfortable or well-ordered without his daughter's presence and superintendence, had, in his own opinion, exercised no small amount of self-denial in sparing her for ten days; and when Thursday evening saw her return, he rejoiced correspondingly. He had many questions to ask, both before dinner and after it, about his old friend Mrs. Tynedale; had also sundry domestic matters to refer to Cecilia, respecting certain changes now making in the management of the garden; which affairs again brought him back to Mrs. Tynedale, and to inquiries as to how the corresponding work was done in her establishment. "The Wyngate people," he observed, "did everything on such

a different scale, that their arrangements could of course be no guide to him, and it was no use asking what they were." He *did* ask, however; and being once launched on the subject of Wyngate, and the establishment there, both in the garden and in the stables, he was not long in travelling thence to that part of the family in which Cecilia was chiefly interested, and then again, by an easy stage, to Lewis Markham, whose intentions he still plumed himself on having guessed. "Not," continued he, "that I have done any great things in the soothsaying line, either—for, as to the girl's refusing him, I confess I never dreamt of such a thing! She must either be out of her mind, or else (begging your pardon, Cecilia, for saying so of your friend's daughter) she must be the most conceited minx alive! What does she expect to catch, I should like to know?"

Cecilia certainly did not know; nor did she know very well either what to say in reply, especially as, in spite of the awkwardness of the subject in Oswald's presence, there was something in this universal impression, at home and abroad, that Katherine Desborough *must* be only fit for a Lunatic Asylum, because she had refused Lewis Markham, which a little inclined her to laugh.

"It can't but be a great trial to her mother," proceeded Mr. Langton; "the girl will never have such an offer again; good family, good fortune, good abilities, and the highest character!

Mark my word, Cecilia! that girl will throw herself away upon some man who doesn't deserve to be compared to him."

"I rather hope she may," observed Oswald, half to himself, but loud enough to be heard by his father, who laughed heartily at his son's "quiet fashion of coming out with such a spiteful wish;" and then went on to make farther inquiries of Cecilia (which, without being in themselves either trifling or tedious, seemed to her as if they would never end) respecting her young friend's age, fortune, personal appearance, tastes, education, etc.

"Ah, that was a false move, Cecy, letting her go to Paris! You may depend upon it she has had her head turned with the hopes of marrying some rascally Count, or Marquis, or Duke, for aught I know; and it's that makes her above thinking of an honest fellow like Markham. I have a notion she'll live to repent it."

As he gave vent to this opinion, the hour of his bed-time struck, and after a few words of kind advice to Cecilia, "to go early to rest after her journey," he left the room, wishing his children good night. Cecilia did not feel quite sure, while the door was closing on him, whether Oswald would or would not speak to her of what she knew he must be thinking of; but he immediately said:

"Thank you for your letter, Cecy. The different things I have heard through you do not, as you say, enlighten one much; but they have settled my mind in one sense, for I not only think

it best on my father's account to stay on here where I am, but it is my pleasure—my wish, at any rate—to remain at home."

"Oh, I shall be *so* glad to keep you! but I should not like you to think afterwards that I had been the means of, in a measure, deceiving you—deluding you with visionary prospects."

"I know, Cecy, that there are no prospects at all—speaking correctly—so if I choose to delude myself, it is my own look out. You have been honestly at pains to hedge with sober details everything that might tend to lead me into a fool's Paradise; if I stray into one, the fault is mine, and mine only. But if that girl does not hate, she may love me yet; and to be loved by her, one might hold it cheap to pay a long price of endurance and observance."

"She is worth it, if any is," said his sister.

"You say she is graver than formerly, yet professes to be contented?" asked he.

"Yes," replied Cecilia; "and whether she actually be so or not, she has entirely left off criticising and complaining of what is around her. She said, when she came to say good-bye to me yesterday, speaking of a letter from Lady Carew, on her removal from the neighbourhood of Geneva to the Baths of Lucca, and full of the delights of the same, 'How much better pleased I am to be here than there!'"

"So she corresponds with Lady Carew still?" inquired he, hastily.

"Yes; is there anything remarkable in that? They had not quarrelled, had they?"

"No, not that I am aware of—I don't know why I asked such a question."

But whatever was his reason for asking it, it is certain that the train of thought therewith—or thereby—awakened, did not appear of a description to strengthen the hope on which he had seemed, a minute before, determined to feed. He knit his brow as he paced slowly up and down the room, and it was not till his sister had more than once repeated the question of "What kind of woman is Lady Carew?" that he said, without stopping in his walk, "A very agreeable woman."

"But," persisted Cecilia, "is she what you would call a good friend for a young girl like Kate Desborough?"

"It doesn't matter where or with whom you put Kate Desborough," returned he; "she might go through fire and not be scorched; though I don't think she's exactly made of ice, either. Lady Carew is vain and frivolous; I never could understand there being any congeniality between them—don't believe there is—or was."

Cecilia listened with astonishment as her brother expressed an opinion so utterly at variance with what she had believed to be the case; but perceiving, by the tone of his voice, that he was impatient—fretted—and remembering that some words, which had fallen from him soon after his return home, had conveyed to her the impression

of his deeming Lady Carew rather unfriendly than otherwise to him and to his suit, she concluded that his short, unsatisfactory replies were perhaps occasioned by the consciousness of inability to speak, with temper, of one from whom he conceived himself to have received ill offices. She therefore forbore from giving token of her surprise, or explaining its cause. This was no season, she thought, for investigations, and she desisted from questioning him farther, albeit extremely desirous of learning what *he* would say of a woman whose name she had, a day or two before, heard mentioned by a visitor of Mrs. Tynedale's, in a manner by no means calculated to exalt her opinion of her discretion or good principles. But though thinking it best to refrain from any allusion to this, she continued to dwell mentally upon it till, as she was lighting her bed-room candle, her inward speculations found vent in the ejaculation:

"Oh, Oswald, how I wish you had fallen in with Kate Desborough in her home instead of abroad!"

"It would have been all the same, Cecy!" replied he as his sister left the room. "And yet," muttered he to himself when she had disappeared, "it may be that it would *not* have been all the same! At any rate, I would rather have found her at Wyngate than where I did!"

He added no more in spoken words to his brief soliloquy; but it was silently carried on through many hours of that night; for the chains of images

and recollections which it brought before him, were of the nature most opposite to those in the contemplation of which the mind can lull itself into peace and happy repose.

CHAPTER XI.

MORE than two months had passed since Cecilia's short visit at Wyngate, and the summer was fading into a pleasant, and, hitherto, mild autumn, when Annie Oakly, coming in almost at dusk from a long and distant ride with her father, and finding the school-room tea over, begged leave, while declining the proffered honour of dining with her parents, to be provided with what she called "her own natural meal," in the library, where she "reckoned," she said, "upon being allowed the farther treat of Kate's company."

Kate looked doubtfully at her mother; for she knew that her readiness to escape from the length and solemnity of the late dinner was not always approved of; but she saw that on this occasion Mr. Oakly's wish to gratify "his Annie," in her own way, rendered it free to her to accept her young sister's invitation, without any farther objection being made, than Mrs. Oakly's murmuring a fear lest it should be "weakening for Kate to go so often without dinner, considering what bad luncheons she made."

The sisters were therefore soon established

together in the library, undisturbed by school-room chatter, unrestrained by dining-room decorum; and as they seated themselves at the table, Annie exclaimed triumphantly:

"Now this is what I call being regularly snug and happy! I don't think you are half grateful to me, Kate, though, for getting you off your doleful hour in the dining-room!"

"Indeed I am, Annie! most grateful! for I feel half dead already with the weariness of this afternoon's doings, and it's such a relief to lean back in my chair, and know I may talk or not talk, listen to you or lecture you (if you need it) just as I please, till they come back into the drawing-room!"

"I'm sure I don't wonder," said Annie, "for there you have been out with mamma, calling upon all the very stupidest of the neighbours—and not even allowed to call them stupid, either; and then you have been sitting without candles, till after it was too dark to read or work. Why didn't you have lights long before we came in?"

"Because I could just see to ground my carpet-work by the fire; and if I had asked for candles to read, mamma would have thought that unsociable, as I was alone with her."

"Kate, you are growing dreadfully good."

"Am I?" asked she, smiling at the alarmed tone in which her progress in virtue was noticed.

"Yes! but you needn't laugh; I am not so silly as you fancy. I know one can't be too good

really; what I mean is, that you may screw yourself up to be always doing everything you don't like till it gets to be too much for you, and you either fly into a rage, some day, and say you *must* have your own way again, or else turn into a stone, like the eldest Miss Dalton, and lose all your fun and spirits! You have not come to that yet, for you let me run on as I please, though you don't talk much yourself; but I can't help being afraid when I see you look, day after day, as if you were bored to death from morning till night, and as if you forced yourself to everything you do."

"If I didn't, I should do nothing at all, Annie!"

"Oh, but you used to sit here in the library a great deal more, reading all sorts of things for your own pleasure, which gave you something better to think of than only 'how tiresome it is to ground carpet-work by fire-light, and to hear about Mrs. Hurst's sprained ancle.'"

"You see, Annie, I have been thought discontented; unwilling to take part in what goes on at home, and I felt that unless I sat more with her, mamma would go on thinking so; which I didn't want."

"I believe I know why you so particularly *don't* want that," said Annie, "and you are partly right, I daresay. But still, I know when Cecilia was here (and you are grown a great deal worse since), she said she thought you were 'too much on a

stretch'—those were her words, and you see it's just the sense of what I was telling you."

"Did Cecilia say that of me?" asked Katherine.

"Indeed she did; and even mamma, when she was observing the other day how punctual you had grown, and how you had quite left off making excuses when you are blamed for anything, said at the same time that you didn't appear like yourself to her, and that she would rather see you as you used to be."

"Mamma said that? She's very hard to please!" exclaimed Katherine, in a tone of bitter vexation.

"Oh, Kate, it wasn't said at all in the way, in the sense I see you understand it! I think mamma was only anxious, afraid lest you might not be quite well; for she went on talking about how good it was of you to break yourself of old habits, and to give me my Italian lessons so regularly, now you are grown up, and might do as you please. She said too that you had so much feeling! she had never known how much till lately."

"Well I suppose I was mistaken just now," replied Katherine, "and I am glad mamma sees I wish to do right; yet it *is* provoking that with all the pains one takes, one should only be thought rather *less* agreeable than formerly."

"I declare I don't know what advice to give you, Kate," said Annie, with a remarkably grave and sage look, "for of course I ought not to say '*don't*

try to do your duty all you can;' but the fact is, for all that one reads in books, and for all the Selwyns say, I am getting to think that, if one is not kept *terribly* strict in the school-room, one is better off there, than as a grown-up young lady (according to the ways of our house at least). So much less is expected of one, and one is out of the way of so many plagues; which is why it is my full intention to catch at everything pleasant I can get hold of now, for fear of not being allowed it later; and do you know, Kate, it was greatly to have a talk with you about some concerns of my own, that I insisted so on getting this hour to ourselves."

Annie paused, and Katherine, well as she was used to her sister's ways, sat in silent wonder as to what was to follow upon so solemn a preamble. Had Miss Oakly (aged twelve and three-quarters) received a proposal of marriage? Or was she devising some plot for getting herself taken to the next county ball at ——?

The suspense was not long, for the little girl soon resumed her discourse by asking her sister "if she remembered how papa had said, last year, that since Kate's hunting was knocked up by her uncles' fancies, he must give in, only he should take Annie into the field as soon as she got a firmer seat, and he could find the proper thing to carry her? Well," proceeded she, after receiving a look of assenting recollection from Katherine, "I'm so improved in my riding, papa says, this year, that he would trust me on anything, and on any ground;

he says I deserve more of a horse than poor dear Daisy, and do you know, Kate, I believe he has been trying me with such long rides this last fortnight, to see that they weren't too much for me, before putting me on Gipsy, and taking me out with him regularly when the hunting begins!"

"And has he spoken to mamma about this, Annie?"

"Ah! there's the thing. I don't believe he would take me out if she were downright to object; so—as she thinks a great deal of you now, Kate—your sense and opinion, I mean (don't laugh, it's quite true!)—I am come to beg and to pray you, my dear, darling sister, not to say anything against my having the greatest of all the pleasures I am likely ever to be given for such years to come! Promise me you won't help mamma to any reasons why I shouldn't do the thing I want most in the world to do!"

As she spoke, she threw her arms round Kate's neck, kissing her cheeks and lips with all the warmth of her eager nature, while she looked up into her sister's eyes with an expression of earnest longing in her own, which moved all the sympathy of one who, though prouder, older, and more reserved, was, at bottom, as pleasure-loving, and as desirous of lively sports and emotions, as was little Annie Oakly.

"My dear child," said she, pressing her still closer, "it would be hard for me to refuse such a promise! and I know how hard I thought it to be

deprived last year of the same pleasure you hope for. But, Annie dear, you are old of your age, not only as regards sitting a spirited pony, but as possessing sense and principle enough to guide your own self if you choose. Do you think it quite a wise or a right thing, to let this hunting of yours be urged and pressed on mamma, knowing, as you must, that she will never really like it, though it is possible she may yield the point?"

"Mamma only dislikes the notion of it because your uncles do! and that doesn't concern me, you know. You don't think it wrong yourself, Kate?"

"I don't see that there is more harm, *in itself*, in riding after a fox, than in riding over the downs after nothing at all; but still many circumstances render it a different matter. For one thing, your being the only creature—or almost the only one—in the shape of a girl or woman among all that crowd of men."

"That's just because the others are too stupid—they or their relations for them!" cried Annie, contemptuously; "and as to the crowd of men, what harm could they do me? I should be with papa, you know."

"I don't suppose they would do you the least bodily harm," said Katherine.

"What kind of harm then?"

"The same sort of harm—in a degree—as that you know a boy gets when he is thrown into the midst of a set of his inferiors, who are not used to see him among them."

"The gentlemen in the hunting-field will not be my inferiors," argued Annie.

"I daresay not; but still the unusualness of a girl joining them on such a sport, would put you very much in the situation of the boy I was supposing, and I think the effect might be the same."

"You mean," said Annie, striving to command herself, "you mean I should be flattered and made a fool of."

"I *know* you would," replied her sister.

"Were *you?*" inquired Annie, eagerly.

"I was flattered; I hope I was not *quite* made a fool of—but I only went out with the hounds three or four times, so there is no saying how it might have been if I had gone oftener."

"You would have been none the worse, *I* say, Kate! Not you! you have too much cleverness to be harmed by nonsense!"

Kate shook her head, but smiled gaily, as she said:

"I won't answer for that, Annie! though you, I see, are quite sure of your own defensive armour."

"Well, why shouldn't I? But really I am not so *very* conceited in thinking I could stand the 'situation' (as you call it) as well as you—better perhaps. You are tall, handsome, stately, Miss Desborough (I've heard papa say how much every creature in the hunting-field admired you!), so it was natural you should be told a great deal of stuff

which no one would trouble himself to talk to a little girl like me. Isn't there a difference?"

"Perhaps a little—but not much," replied Katherine, stroking her sister's hair. "And then, Annie," continued she, "though I hardly dare urge on you an objection I disregarded myself—that of shocking the feelings and prejudices of many among our friends—still, you had better think of it, and consider whether you might not be terribly hurt one day, at finding yourself confounded with such masculine women as Mrs. Slanning, for instance; while, on the other hand, you would feel it a dreadful sacrifice to give up your favorite amusement just as you are growing up!"

"If everyone is so shocked that I *must* knock under when I am seventeen," said Annie resolutely, "it will be a horrid bore; but still I shall have had *some* fun; and rather than not at all, I'll have it while I am considered a child, and people won't, I believe, care so much. Kate dear, you are looking sadly melancholy! Do you think me very wicked?" asked the little girl, in her most caressing tone.

"Not wicked! no, only rash," was the answer.

"If that's all—if you think me no worse than rash, dear Kate, I don't mind! If you thought me very wrong indeed, it would make me unhappy—but you see—in short, I have set my heart on hunting twice a week this winter, and—for all you don't quite like it—still I may reckon (may not I,

my dear, good Kate?) on your not doing anything to hinder it? That's all I ask, remember!"

"Well, Annie, I won't do what you call 'help mamma to reasons' against your hunting, since that would vex you so much; but if either she or your papa ask me my opinion—why—you know I must give the true one."

"To be sure—I couldn't wish you to pretend—though I *do* wish your real opinion was different," said Annie, gravely; "but I hope they won't ask for it."

"I scarcely think they will," returned her sister, "they don't often, for all you say mamma considers me so sensible."

"They might this time though, just because I don't want it," observed Annie, rather musingly.

Both now sat silent for some moments, at the end of which Annie raised her head, looked full at her sister, and said, in a very serious tone:

"Kate, I have not thought all this time of something I ought to have thought of; but now I expect you to answer me the very truth from your heart! I know the advice you have been giving me has been all through your notion of what is right, and has nothing to do with any other feeling. Still, if besides *that*, it would vex you—if you couldn't help being grieved and provoked—that *I* should be allowed a thing *you* are not allowed (though you have a better right to it than I)—if I were to think every time I went out 'there's poor Kate wishing herself in my place, and quite moped,' I should

have no pleasure in my runs—and—I would give the thing up this minute, I assure you."

Annie took a deep breath as she abruptly closed her speech; Kate kissed her affectionately, and said:

"You are a dear, warm-hearted thing, whether you are wise or foolish, Annie! But I don't want you to give up hunting on that ground, for indeed I do not covet it now, much as I was disappointed and put out when I was forced to leave it off last year. If I know myself, I shall not covet it again; and I don't believe I shall envy you when I see you setting out with your papa; so, unless you can, on reflection, make up your mind to deny yourself for other reasons, there is nothing—connected with me—to hinder you."

"Then there is nothing at all!" cried Annie. "Nothing I care a straw for at least! Of course if mamma forbids me there is an end; but if I am given my own way for once, shan't I just take it?"

She cast a glance of merry defiance on Kate, looking forward, like a spoilt child as she was, to an easy victory over her mother's prejudices; but as her sister exclaimed warmly, "My darling Annie, I wish you all pleasure of your own way, if you do but escape your neck being broken, or your brain being turned through getting it!" a change came over her countenance, and tears glistened in her eyes.

"I'll try and keep them both safe, Kate!" said she, laughing, nevertheless, in spite of her

emotion; "and I do thank you heartily for your promise not to put spokes in the wheel; it is all you can give, I know, and I think you will see, some day, that you were more frightened than you need be, either for my neck or my brains—such as they are."

They kissed each other affectionately, and soon hearing a half hour struck by the hall clock, which told them it was later than they supposed, they made haste to finish their somewhat over cool tea, and separated; Annie to go into the school-room and write, by bedtime, an exercise which ought to have been got through earlier in the day, and Katherine to return to her tapestry-work in the drawing-room, where she presently heard a "sotte voce" conversation going on between her mother and her step-father, evidently on the subject of Annie's hunting.

"She is such a child!" urged Mr. Oakly; "nothing that's said against young ladies hunting can apply to such a mere child as she!"

"Very true," said his wife, "but then she will not always be a child."

"When she is grown up we can act as we then see fit about it," observed Mr. Oakly.

"But she'll think it hard, poor thing, to have it stopped. I know how it will be if it once begins," returned Mrs. Oakly, "and I can't bear a girl of mine being called 'a fox-hunting young lady.'"

"If you can't bear it, my dear, it shan't be," said Mr. Oakly in a vexed tone, "though I believe

there is more of prejudice than reason in your dislike; but in any opinion . . . ."

And here he so lowered his voice, that Katherine could not catch any more of his words. She suspected they concerned her, both from his whispering and from her mother's answering, "that she didn't think *that* would have made any difference; that there was nothing so variable as young people's spirits, and she was satisfied the decision made last year was right."

Little more was said on the subject that evening, as the debate was adjourned; but Katherine perceived that it was carried on, with more or less of eagerness, for the next fortnight. During this space her mother frequently bewailed to her her fear "lest Mr. Oakly should *insist* on taking Annie out hunting with him, which was such a pity!" but without ever asking her opinion on the matter, or entering farther into her own, than by showing a general dislike to the plan, and a great dread of what might be *said* of the proceeding. Katherine was often on the point of exclaiming, "Oh, that is so much the least of the objections to it!" but her promise to Annie stopped her mouth; and though doubtful of having done well in giving it, the engagement, once taken, must be kept. By degrees, as she had foreseen, Mrs. Oakly's opposition grew fainter and fainter, till she at last yielded, not a very ready, but still a distinct consent to Annie's hunting occasionally that season, "provided she was never to go out more than

twice in the same week, and that the doings of this year were not to be looked on as a precedent for a succeeding one."

Annie jumped at the permission granted, no matter on what conditions; and Mr. Oakly, who seldom saw any reason against what happened to suit his fancy of the moment, was delighted with the opportunity of proving to the Desborough family, that he could and would show himself, in the management of his own daughter, superior to the illiberal prejudices, in deference to which he had given up exhibiting their niece's perfect horsemanship to the ——shire world. He had greatly enjoyed the sort of additional consequence given him, on his hunting days, through the sensation caused by the presence of his handsome and well-endowed step-daughter; he knew that Annie could hardly cast the same amount of reflected glory on him as her sister had done; but she was a pretty, arch-looking little girl; ready-witted and lively, as well as a capital rider, which qualities were more than sufficient to ensure her a flattering reception. All this was not consciously calculated in his mind; but the vague feeling of it resulted in his thinking it would be very pleasant, both for himself and her, to set up Annie, in default of Kate, as the hunting Diana of the neighbourhood; and this again led to his easily persuading himself "that it would do the girl all the good in the world," though he never explained very distinctly in what that good was likely to consist. At any

rate the thing was to be, so he was satisfied; and if her father was satisfied, it may readily be conceived into what height of the seventh Heaven Annie was transported; as also to what a pitch of eager interest she was worked up on the subject of her dress, her horse, her saddle, and every detail of her accoutrement. Large claims were made on Katherine's sympathy, of which she bestowed a good deal, considering that she did not look on the end and aim of all these preparations as desirable, and considering, moreover, that Mr. and Mrs. Oakly's discussions about Annie's hunting had now given place to very much more serious ones concerning her brother Fred, at which she frequently assisted, to her no small worry and anxiety.

"What should be done with Fred?" was the question; "done with him," for the approaching winter, that is; for by the spring it was hoped there would be a commission for him, and then his doings or misdoings would be the affair of his Queen and Country, not solely of Mr. Oakly or of his uncles Desborough. His private tutor, Mr. Streatfield, had, some while back, declared, for the fourth and last time, his inability to manage his pupil, whom he now only retained under his nominal charge, till his guardians had decided whither to remove him. The young gentleman himself had laid before them his own opinion, "that it was time his education were considered finished," and had, moreover—to his

mother's extreme delight—though scarcely to that of Mr. Oakly—expressed his wish to be allowed to await his commission at Wyngate, which he meant to make his head-quarters, and where he hoped to enjoy the hunting-season without the drawback of being even supposed to pursue further studies. Master Fred's proposal might have been acceded to, had it not become latterly doubtful whether it would not be expedient to remove him farther out of the reach of certain companions (supposed to exercise a very injurious influence over him), than he could be in any place in England. These companions were young men older than himself, and belonging—various of them—to the same set which was so attractive to Alexander Langton. Though professedly at Mr. Streatfield's, he had been constantly staying with one or other of them, and his relations had also reason to believe that, in addition to every kind of folly and extravagance (by means of which he had greatly exceeded the very handsome allowance made him), he was now getting a theatrical mania, which threatened to lead him into yet more perilous gulfs. Upon this discovery, a long and close correspondence ensued between Mrs. Oakly and the Messrs. Desborough, who, building their arguments on the ground that their nephew could hardly spend his time *worse* than he had lately done in his own country, suggested that he might be more manageable in another, if sent abroad on a long tour, under the charge

of an unexceptionable private tutor, or "steady friend."

"There is something, I daresay, in what your uncles think," Mrs. Oakly sometimes ejaculated, in a piteous tone, to Katherine; "but still I can't bear the notion of dear Fred's spending the winter at such a distance from all of us, poor fellow! It is most desirable, no doubt, as your uncle Herbert expressed it, 'that every tie should be cut,' that binds him to such people as these Humes and Begbies, who are always leading him into some sad expense or frolic; but now winter is coming on, and he would be living really so much with us on account of the hunting, I don't think there is so much danger; though, to be sure, there is the fear of his spending Christmas at the Slannings' too! For the present he is safe—at least I hope so—staying at Shadworth with the Langtons. I had a note from dear Cecilia, mentioning when he came, and how pleasant he was making himself. He is on a visit there to Alexander, who, I am sorry to say, has left Oxford—for a time at least. I could wish him a better friend, but still the family is most respectable; and though Shadworth *is* so near Kingsford (which I have always looked on as a decided objection to the place), still I don't think him likely to get into any very undesirable company while there, with Cecilia, who has always been like a mother to him, and of whom he is so fond; besides there being such a sensible man in the house, as I hear the eldest

brother is, to be a kind of check upon the younger ones."

"Are you sure he is still there?" asked Katherine.

"Quite certain," replied her mother, "for Cecilia mentions him in her letter, and says what a comfort it is to her, now the weather is getting trying for old Mr. Langton, to have Oswald at home. I remember, in the summer, she did expect he might start for the Continent as soon as she got back; but I see he has staid on, which is having more consideration than most men show their sisters. No wonder she has always spoken so affectionately of him!"

Katherine made no reply; her mother's rambling speech did not need any; so she went quietly on with her carpet work, and for a minute or two no word was uttered by mother or daughter, till the former broke silence by asking "where Lady Carew had talked of wintering, in her last letter?"

There were combinations in Katherine's mind, which inclined her to start on hearing this inquiry follow so immediately upon laudatory mention of Cecilia's brother; but repressing all outward token of what passed within her, she answered calmly, "that Florence had been thought of as the Carew's abode for the next few months." She shortly perceived that her mother had been thinking only of "poor dear Fred," for whose benefit she was considering what Continental city was likely to be

the pleasantest, and with reference to whom she dilated for some time on "the advantage it would be for him (if his uncles *would* send him abroad) to fall in with *nice* English families."

At length, something called her away; and no sooner was the daughter freed from restraint by her mother's quitting the room, than she flung her work from her, and inwardly ejaculated:

"Oh, that my wearisome, heartless, hypocritical correspondence with Isabella Carew were at an end! Yet how put an end to what she *chooses* to keep up, unless I told my mother those things which—the more I see the more sure I am—she *could* not help revealing where it would do most mischief?"

She took up her tapestry again, almost as impatiently as she had thrown it from her, and worked away, with more speed than correctness, while she reflected on the exceeding difficulty of looking unconcerned when she was asked—as the Selwyns never called without asking her—"when she last heard from Lady Carew?" and of the still greater difficulty of looking equally unconcerned when, after that invariable speech, other and more searching questions were put, more significant remarks were made. "Was it absolutely true—Mrs. Hazlewood had said so, but they couldn't believe it—that Lady Carew visited the Countess Korinski? Was it while Kate was there, or was it afterwards, that that *charming* French gentlemen they had heard of, was making

Lady Carew so particular?" Such—or such like—had been the first attacks; the last had been stronger. "Well, Kate, you were very discreet in the summer, when you *wouldn't* know who it was that was so charming—I can tell *you* now! We have just been staying with Lady Mary Ridley, and her mother, Lady Castleford, had just been, with her other daughters, at the Baths of Lucca. They had known Lady Carew before, and do you know, they were so shocked! She and this Mr. de Neyrac were quite inseparable, and Sir Edward taking no notice of it! seeming quite delighted with him himself! And he *is* very delightful, they all agree in *that*."

How well or how ill this gossiping chatter had been parried, Katherine could not tell; she only knew how heartily she wished she had never been in Paris, to be there again bewitched by her idol of former times, and again disenchanted—how much more fearfully than before! She had, as a matter of course, written a few lines to Lady Carew, to let her know of her safe arrival in her home; and had hoped, as they required no answer, that none would be sent, for a considerable time at least. But the "few lines" were responded to by a full-sized letter, written as Lady Carew and her husband were starting for the much-dreaded visit to the Scudamores' Swiss "Campagne," where, however, they did not intend, she said, to stay above a fortnight, but where, as she also said, she expected to hear again from "her dear Kate." It

had followed, therefore, that "dear Kate" had thought herself obliged to write a letter, on her return from the Moat, in which epistle she made Lady Carew aware of Oswald Langton's proposal, and her refusal of the same. She had entered into no particulars, simply stating the fact, of which (considering what had passed between them in Paris) she did not wish to make a secret to her, although she intended to keep it such from her own relations. Katherine was not without hope, either, that this intelligence might have the effect of disposing her correspondent to that cessation of intercourse which, to *her*, would have been such a relief. But nothing of the kind ensued; for Lady Carew's reply, dated from the Baths of Lucca, was both a long and a lively one; one, moreover, that denoted the expectation of an answer within a short time. Not that it overlooked or ignored the matter of Oswald Langton's proposal, to which she alluded in a distinct though concise and business-like manner, expressing her approval of "Kate's good sense in rejecting what was so unlikely to make her happy," and adding a hope "that she would reserve herself for one whose sincere devotion would make him worthy of such a reward."

This letter was not answered quite so soon as the writer seemed to desire; for Katherine considered that she had done her duty for the present; and that, having once for all explained how matters stood between her and Oswald Langton, any farther

act or deed, implying the existence of "mutual confidence," would be worse than useless. She thought it unnecessary to explain, therefore, that, whatever might be her motive for refusing Oswald Langton's suit, it was certainly *not* doubt of that attachment, in which the might of truth had now forced her to believe. Still less was she likely to give token of the unacknowledged feeling which that belief had awakened in her, of the regret she could not stifle, for having been—as she considered—bound to act as she had done. She did not precisely confess this regret to herself; she had spoken truth when she told Cecilia "that she did not repent;" yet the whole thing had wrought a change in her, had produced a despondency and premature disappointment with life, and had no doubt prompted her refusal of Lewis Markham, whose declaration might otherwise have affected her very differently. She had, however, been too deeply hurt—too bitterly offended—by the clear perception that everyone made sure she *must* have given away her heart elsewhere, because she had not responded with delight to the offer made her—to be in a condition to examine herself very strictly on this point; and deliberately refusing to see the truth, she persisted in her opinion "that what had passed at the Moat had had nothing to do with her subsequent decision." Those "insulting suspicions," as she deemed them, had, nevertheless, the effect of adding to the nervous dread with which she contemplated a discovery of that first refusal, and

the consequent probing and searching into feelings and motives, from which she now shrunk, almost as much on her own account, as on hers whose secret she had determined to keep.

CHAPTER XII.

THE question of Fred Desborough's going abroad, or remaining in England, continued to be debated, till, at the end of a few days, it appeared that he had, as Mr. Oakly expressed it, "got himself into such a devil of a scrape," that there could no longer be any doubt, even in his mother's view, as to the expediency of his making a temporary retreat from the scenes of his most glaring folly and misconduct. Fred's "scrape," which, in truth, consisted in his having narrowly escaped a trial for manslaughter, had arisen out of that theatrical mania, which had lately given his uncles so much uneasiness. This passion for the stage by no means confined itself to the pursuit of such amusements as a spectator, nor even to the frequenting of "theatrical society," but extended to what was more personal—namely, a love of acting on his own account. His performance at various private—and semi-private—representations had been much admired; nor was this admiration dictated by mere flattery, for the gift he possessed for the art he delighted in was indeed considerable. This gift (set off by great personal grace, and pliancy of form and manner)

was, moreover, enhanced by a quick and ready power of assimilating himself to whatever it was his aim to imitate, and was united with a rare facility in acquiring such knowledge or skill as it at any time suited his fancy to obtain; a combination of qualities fitted to win him attention and success in any society, and which—in that he was chiefly surrounded by—procured him unbounded adulation. His vanity grew more and more greedy; and his desire of public applause in those characters he was supposed to personate "better than any of the professionals," became so strong, that he had more than once prevailed (by whatever persuasive means) on managers of Provincial establishments to receive his services (under a feigned name) for a night or two. This fact was suspected by his uncles, whose suspicion was vehemently resented by the youth's mother; but the warnings dealt him by the Mr. Desboroughs, "in case of his ever being tempted to such imprudence," bore so little fruit, that on discovering, while at Shadworth, that the small theatre in the town of Kingsford was now open, he knew no rest till he had made interest to enact one of his favourite parts in that celebrated watering and sporting place.

Frederick Desborough accordingly left the Langtons, ostensibly for the home of his uncle Herbert, in the neighbouring county; but, in fact, to spend a few days, incognito (to all except Alexander), in Kingsford. He there found himself exactly in the element congenial to a vain and uncontrolled spoilt

child—that is, among a crowd of men and women who were pleased with his notice in itself, and who paid amply, in flattery, for his condescension and his presents. He was persuaded that the fame of "Mr. Fitzroy Danby's" performance of the "crack part," in a piece as yet unknown to the Kingsford boards, was necessarily to fly through the length and breadth of England, if he were but properly supported—and enabled, moreover, by the help of certain arrangements of machinery, to show off, in the last scene, a feat of personal dexterity, on which he valued himself highly, and on the perfect execution of which, much of the effect of the entertainment depended.

At the first rehearsal, one of the workpeople busied in the preparations for this achievement, either neglected or forgot some detail about the placing of a cord, for which he was sharply reproved by the amateur actor; at the second, the same mistake occurred; and Fred Desborough, always hot-tempered, abused the carpenter grossly, and would have proceeded from words to blows, had he not been restrained by the bystanders. Now, whether from stupidity or obstinacy, or from being—as some said—jealous of Mr. Fitzroy Danby's attentions to a figurante the man was engaged to, the mistake was repeated at the regular performance; and when, at the critical moment in the closing scene, the hero should have sprung upon the stage from a great height, drawn sword in hand, the means of doing so failed him; roars of

laughter rose from the pit, and the curtain fell among ignominious hisses. Maddened with anger and mortified vanity, the disappointed amateur turned round to vent his rage on something or somebody; and seeing the culprit, as he considered him, standing in one of the passages leading from the side scenes, he rushed furiously upon him, and dealt him a blow with the weapon he held in his hand, which laid him bleeding and senseless on the ground! The consternation that ensued can be better imagined than described; and it is probable that Mr. Fitzroy Danby's fame would indeed have spread, in the next few days, from the Land's End to John o' Groat's House (though not in the manner contemplated by himself), had not Alexander Langton, who was in the theatre, instantly flown in quest of his brother Oswald, who happened, as he knew, to be dining with a friend in Kingsford. He hastened to the spot, and forthwith took upon himself to promise, in the name of the youth's guardians, liberal compensation to the injured person, who was severely—though not, it was hoped, mortally—wounded. He also held out to the manager, and to such other individuals as might have a guess at the real name of the vindictive amateur, hopes of their discretion being amply rewarded, provided they would but restrain their tongues and pens, both as to the row in general, and the hero of the row in particular.

The decision with which Oswald Langton acted, combined with his good sense and right feeling in

not pretending to take a light view of the affair, on the one hand—or giving way, on the other, before bullying threats—prevailed at length so far, as to enable him late that night—or early in the morning, rather—to carry Fred Desborough away with him, to Shadworth. At that place he, next day, left him under the surveillance of Alexander and Cecilia (Lewis Markham, who was then at Fenhurst, being called in to complete the committee of safety); while he himself—first passing through Kingsford, to ascertain the state of the wounded man—hastened to the residence of Herbert Desborough, in order to acquaint him with all the circumstances of his nephew's situation, and to endeavour to obtain ratification and fulfilment of the engagements he had—in pressing necessity—thought himself justified in entering into, as on the part of the young man's relations. Luckily, Herbert Desborough, though narrow-minded enough on some points, was sufficiently rational, as well as sufficiently a man of the world, to see that, under the circumstances, no sacrifice was to be grudged; luckily too, he was pleased with Oswald Langton (he said, afterwards, "that he had transacted a most *dis*agreeable piece of business as *agreeably* as was possible"); and he hesitated not a moment in placing at his disposal the—noways inconsiderable—sum requisite for the satisfaction of those who held his nephew's reputation in their hands. In short, by a happy combination of "good luck with good manage-

ment," young Desborough's act of lawless violence was kept out of the courts of justice, and even out of the newspapers—an advantage of which every member of a family, nervously sensitive to what concerned their standing in the world's estimation, was likely to be deeply sensible; and the more so as they were chiefly indebted for the service to a gentleman of good birth and position, to whom they were not ashamed of being obliged, and who, as brother to the intimate friend of the youth's mother and sister, was likely to consider himself really paid for the trouble of his efforts by their success. But it was not to be expected that any amount of money or address could hinder some very unpleasant whispers from going about, or stop private speculation as to what identity might —or might not—exist between Fred Desborough and Fitzroy Danby, the amateur actor—concerning whose unfortunate début, and sudden disappearance from Kingsford, such strange rumours were in circulation. It followed, therefore, that if his passing the winter out of England had been already thought desirable, it was now considered by his uncles a kind of necessity; and as Mrs. Oakly had no argument to oppose to theirs, she could only weep over what she no longer attempted to hinder.

"Oswald Langton must be a very sensible fellow," observed Mr. Oakly; "just the right sort of man to help you at a pinch; for had he been one minute later with his promises of compensation,

or one atom less relied on for honour and judgment into the bargain, we should have had Master Fred's name figuring in no very pleasant manner in every paper we took up."

"I have always heard he was clever," said Mrs. Oakly, in a melancholy tone.

"Clever, yes," repeated her husband; "but it doesn't always follow that your clever men are sensible—act sensibly—at least."

"I suppose not," returned his wife; "but I wish," continued she, with a sigh, "that Shadworth had not been near such a resort for sporting men, and all that sporting men bring along with them, as Kingsford; if it weren't for that, it would have been such a nice place for dear Fred to stay at!"

"If it weren't for that vicinity, I greatly doubt that he would have thought it worth while to visit there at all," said Mr. Oakly. "I should like to see Oswald Langton," proceeded he, "if it were only to thank him for the trouble he has taken. How long did he stay at the Moat, Kate, when you were there?"

"Only one day," she replied.

"Well, if he goes there again, I must call on him."

"Of course you will do so if you like, George; only it's quite unnecessary as regards showing him the family's sense of his kindness," interposed Mrs. Oakly, who felt at the moment a nervous dread of coming in contact with one who had just

seen her dear Fred under such disadvantageous circumstances. "For," continued she, "not only has Herbert Desborough done that, and had him to stay with him, too, last week; but *I* have said everything that ought to be said in a note to Cecilia; so—unless you particularly wished to go to the Moat—I should say it was best not, as it would seem odd *then* for us not to ask him to the house, and I really have not spirits to receive any strangers this winter."

"Cecilia Langton's brother is hardly a stranger," remarked her husband; "but," added he, carelessly, as he left the room, "we can see when the time comes; he is not at the Moat now, and isn't likely to be for some time, I take it."

Mrs. Oakly moved slowly away to seat herself, with her back to her daughter, at her own private writing table, where she was presently absorbed, first in the composition of a necessary letter to her brother-in-law, and then in the inditing of a letter of advice to her son; which last was very unnecessary, seeing that it was his custom to put such epistles (unread) into his pocket, from which place of safety they were, in due course of time, transferred to the fire. Katherine, meanwhile, remained where she was, recovering, as she best might, from the state of uneasy suspense in which she had sat, while her step-father was expressing his wish for a personal acquaintance with Oswald Langton. But after the conversation was over, she gradually came to the conclusion that between

her lover's pride, and her mother's indolent disinclination to receive a new guest, there was little danger of her being brought again into the collision she dreaded.

"If I saw any real probability of having to meet him," said she to herself, "I should think it right to tell mamma what passed at the Moat; but till I see *that*, I may spare myself anything so painful as it must always be, to mention an action one is not free to account for. I wonder how it all is with that man," continued she, mentally, as she leaned back in her chair, and closing her eyes, gave up her mind to vain attemps at solving difficulties and reconciling contradictions. Was she awake when she listened in the park of St. Cloud to what seemed to be only too strongly confirmed by her own observations? Or was she dreaming now, when all united in commending him, whom she believed to have put the finishing stroke to that ruin of a once dear friend, which a mercenary marriage had begun? She rose from her seat hastily, as if change of place could give a change to the current of ideas within her; and her determination not to give way any longer to such speculations, was assisted by hearing her name loudly called from the top of the stairs by Annie, entreating her to "come up and see if all was complete about her new habit."

CHAPTER XIII.

It was a proud day for Annie Oakly, when she at last set out, one fine mild November morning, to ride to cover with her father; and it was not to be denied that—whether her being brought out from the school-room to the hunting field when under thirteen were a wise measure or no—she looked very pretty, as well as very happy, mounted on her black Galloway Gipsy, her countenance beaming with joy, and her slight springy figure upright as a dart. Her mother sighed as she watched her ride off, and "hoped that poor dear Annie wouldn't be led into taking the fences, as her father had been besought not to let her do!" Katherine sighed also; she would have found it difficult, even in her own heart, to say exactly why; for (though not precisely conscious of that provoked, disappointed feeling at seeing another permitted a pleasure denied to herself, which she had so eagerly, and so sincerely, disclaimed) her sigh was certainly not entirely prompted by her sense of the trials to which Annie was likely to be exposed. Whatever might be at the root of the melancholy which momentarily oppressed her, she soon shook it off,

and did her best, during the day, to soothe and joke away the terrors which excited her mother's imagination in the matter of five-barred gates.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Oakly's nervous fears increased to such a pitch, that even before four o'clock she declared that "something must have happened, or they would be home already." Katherine reminded her in vain of the many times that Mr. Oakly had not returned from hunting before a much later hour, till, finally, just as it was beginning to grow dusk, without any previous sounds having reached the drawing-room, which was at some distance from the court-yard, a light step was heard in the hall, the door flew open, and Annie rushed into her mother's arms, exclaiming:

"There, mamma, you see I'm safe, and I *have* enjoyed myself so!"

"There, mamma," said Mr. Oakly, following his daughter into the room, "did not I tell you I should bring her back sound and well?"

"And not one bit tired!" cried Annie; "if there were but light, I could take another run before tea-time!"

"Well, I believe she would! up to anything, as Templeton said to me this morning, when she cleared the fence at Stonerig!"

"Oh! you don't mean that you allowed her?" cried Mrs. Oakly.

"Couldn't help it," replied her husband, laughing; "and the monkey did it so well, I hadn't the heart to scold her afterwards."

"Ah! I daresay; but that's what alarms me so sadly," pleaded she in a plaintive tone.

"Kate," said Annie, when these remarks were over, "I want you to help me off with all this, so come up to mamma's dressing-room; there's a fire there, and we can chat snugly while I undo my habit; I told Margaret to put my things there, so come along, do."

And she dragged her sister away with her, little heeding her father's playful rebuke for "giving herself airs, and having her elders to wait on her."

"I'm not quite come to that pitch yet, whatever papa may think," said Annie, as they entered Mrs. Oakly's boudoir, "for I *can* wait upon myself, if need be! See, my body is off already, and my skirt too, only I liked better to have you than Margaret, so just fasten me behind, like a dear creature as you are! There, my frock's on, and now I'm all right again let me sit down on the stool at your feet (my favourite place, you know), while I tell you first how much, how *very* much obliged to you I am for not having done anything to hinder my hunting, though you didn't quite like it; and then . . . ."

Here Annie paused, and putting both her hands on her sister's knees, looked knowingly up in her face.

"Well, Annie, and then?" asked Katherine.

"And then, Kate, I have something to tell you, something you ought to be very much obliged to me for! I might keep it all to myself, and if I

were a pink of propriety I suppose I should—but—I have had a lover of yours riding by my side best part of the day! what do you think of that?"

"Why, was Robert Hazlewood out with the hounds to-day?" asked Katherine.

"Robert Hazlewood indeed! nothing to do with so old a story as that; no, this was some one *I* never saw before; but he's very agreeable and very good-looking, and I see you know now whom I mean, by your getting as red as a turkey-cock! Come, tell me his name!"

"How can I, you nonsensical child? Is it a person that I know? that I have really met anywhere?"

"I should just think you had, though you have hardly ever talked of him to me. You met him in Paris, and at the Moat, too."

"Cecilia's brother is the only man I have met at both those places. You don't mean that *he* was out with you?"

"But I do though! He is staying again at the Moat, has got his horses there, and came to cover with Mr. Spencer Langton. The moment papa saw them, he said he was 'sure that must be Oswald Langton with his brother,' and so it was. Then we rode up (papa and I) to where they were; papa spoke to Mr. Spencer Langton first; and I don't know whether he introduced him, or papa introduced himself to his brother, but they began talking directly, and of course there was thanking for kindness to Fred, and proper

speeches on both sides, all done in a way that made me like Mr. Oswald Langton that minute. Well, before the dogs had found, papa turned to talk to Mr. Templeton, and Mr. Spencer Langton introduced his brother formally to me, just as if I had been grown up—as if Miss Oakly and Mr. Oswald Langton were being introduced in a ball-room; and though I didn't know what to do at the moment, I felt, directly after, the same as if I had known him all my life! He said he did not know that you had a sister who was already a horsewoman, and then something, the sense of which was, I believe, that I had a better seat than most men. But what he went on about, and kept talking of as long as it was possible to talk, was you, Kate, and nothing but you! Oh, you needn't curl your lip up so disdainfully! for in your heart I know you don't and can't disdain him!"

"I didn't say I did, Annie; and one needn't disdain a person because one is not put out of one's wits with delight at being inquired after by him."

"Inquired after, indeed!" repeated Annie, "as if it was the least like that! Mr. Spencer Langton inquired after you very politely; but his *brother* asked me, first, whether you were at Wyngate, then whether you ever went on visits, and if you were likely to go anywhere at Christmas; after that he wanted to know if you rode, if you ever hunted; and when I told him how you

had been hindered by your uncles, after going out two or three times, he said it was a great pity; but he did not quite wonder at Mr. Desborough; about which, of course, I could not agree with him. Then I said (I couldn't help it!) how well you looked on horseback, and how everyone admired you; and I can't exactly describe the look he gave: he seemed half pleased, half provoked! but I suspect now, too, that he thought me a shocking goose for telling him what he knew —or could guess—just as well as I. But what struck me most was, that, besides all those questions he asked, he knew—as of himself—so much of what you have done, and where you have been lately; he knew that you were at the Abchurch ball, and at the Selwyns' archery party, and some other place, too—I forget what—only I know he was quite right about your being there, and the exact time, too."

"Not so very surprising," observed Katherine, "considering that Cecilia almost always hears where we go."

"Not surprising, of course, in itself," replied Annie, "and I don't know that there is really anything to be *surprised* at in the matter at all; but what I noticed was his being so interested—so taken up—with everything that concerned you, though he didn't once say he wished to see you, or hope you might go to the Moat again, or anything of that sort; it seemed as if he couldn't, somehow! and yet I feel sure that he is longing

—dying—to meet you once more, though he made no speech of that kind, and sent you no message."

"I should think not, indeed!" exclaimed Katherine.

"What! would that have been against all rules?" asked her sister, smiling.

"I don't know about rules, Annie, but it would have been useless; for I don't wish Mr. Oswald Langton to trouble himself about me, and I *do* wish him to see and feel that any such trouble is wasted."

"Do you dislike him, Kate?"

"I don't think him tiresome, or ugly, or conceited-mannered, or any of those things which make one *dislike* a person according to the word's usual sense; but neither do I dislike Lewis Markham, yet—you know about that—and—in short, Annie, I wish to behave straightforwardly and consistently by everyone."

"So you are not glad I met Mr. Langton to-day?" said Annie, mournfully.

"I can't be," replied her sister, in a tone which was quite as melancholy.

"Well, Kate, if you had told me you did not like him, I should have tried, at least, to manage differently; but how could I guess you wouldn't be pleased to hear how much you are loved by anyone so agreeable and so well thought of by everyone as Mr. Oswald Langton seems? Cecilia's brother, too!"

"Cecilia's brother, too!" repeated her sister involuntarily, and heaving a deep sigh as her lips closed.

"Kate, I don't know what to make of you! I see tears in your eyes! Do tell me what is the matter—what is the difficulty!"

"There is no difficulty," answered Katherine, steadying her voice with effort, "only, to prevent any from arising, you must, if you should ever meet this gentleman again, try and avoid talking so much of . . . . "

"Oh, my dear Kate," interrupted Annie, "I'm sure to see him next Tuesday, for he particularly asked if I should go out with Mr. Dalton's hounds that day, and said he should make a point of doing so too, though it will be a long way to cover from the Moat, papa says. He seemed so very much pleased to have met me, I could not but be glad I was to see him again."

"I knew you would be flattered, and made a goose of," said her sister, turning away impatiently.

"Oh, Kate, don't say such things! How can you think, for as silly as I may be, that I could be *so* silly, *so* conceited, as to think, one minute, that Mr. Langton rode by me this whole day, and talked as he did, for any reason but to hear all he could hear about *you*, you naughty, ungrateful Kate!"

"I'm not ungrateful to *you*, whatever I am!" cried Katherine, warmly clasping her sister in her arms, and raising her from her lowly seat, to press

her to her bosom. "You are not conceited! I will say that for you, Annie," continued she, "though you do sometimes look and talk as if you were. It is not your fault meeting Mr. Langton to-day, nor being likely to meet him on Tuesday; it can't be helped; but remember, dearest, I don't want him to come here, nor your papa to call on him at the Moat (unless he is quite determined of himself to do so), nor do I want you to tell him more than just what you must in civility, in answer to his questions about me. I don't mean to marry him, and the sooner he understands that the better."

"Well, Kate, I suppose you know best, and I won't do anything to put you into difficulties; and if you don't choose to marry—for a long while at least—why it's so much the better for me! though, if you are to marry at all, I don't think you will ever find any one more taking than Mr. Langton! I *did* think you were rather tired of Wyngate too, and I began to fancy to-day that perhaps—however, I see I was mistaken, and there's an end. Only tell me, do mamma and papa know that—that—do they know what I have found out to-day?"

"They do not, and—as there are things one can manage better one's self than they can be settled for one—I did not mean to tell them, though I *may* be obliged. Till I do so, I know I can depend upon you, Annie."

"That you may, Kate!" cried the little girl, pleased with even the measure of confidence bestowed on her; "you may rely on my not saying

a single word; and I'll do everything you wish in every way; though I *am* sorry for Mr. Langton; he loves you so, Kate!"

By this time sounds of steps on the stairs indicated the possible approach of either Mrs. Oakly or her maid, and the sisters separated, one to dress for dinner, the other to rush down, as fast as she could, to the school-room tea.

Katherine found, in the course of the evening, that her step-father had been, in his way, quite as favourably impressed by Oswald Langton, as Annie in hers; but she thought herself reprieved from the threatened necessity of "confessing," by perceiving that her mother made use of Mr. Oakly's having now "said all the proper things" to Fred's friend-in-need, to prove that no obligation lay on him to call at the Moat, or to ask any of the Langtons to Wyngate. He did not entirely agree with her; but neither was he bent on carrying through his intentions immediately, "because," as he observed, "between hunting and one thing or another, he had hardly a free day just then;" and Katherine trusted that before the "free day" came, Oswald Langton might either have left, or be just leaving, his brother's abode.

In the resolution to "confess," if need were, Katherine did not waver; albeit the notion of doing so had certainly not become less disagreeable to her. There was something in her dread of it which she did not exactly like to fathom, though

she explained it to herself in a thousand ways, which, however, all tended to make her dwell more and more on the many inexplicable things bound up with Oswald Langton. Amongst these, it was not the least remarkable, that he appeared to have the good word of almost every creature in *England*, whereas in Paris, though it would not have been strictly true to say he was unpopular among his countrymen, still she had never heard him there spoken of with the warmth of feeling he seemed to inspire at home. She herself, up to the time when their quarrel about the countess had forced them into a kind of intimacy, had found him reserved, cold, supercilious even; and to this manner he was always apt to recur, till, on meeting him at the Moat, she asked herself "how it could be that the same man should have quite another countenance?" Under the influence of that countenance, and under the spell of that—apparently—frank and honest demeanour, his sister-in-law's prejudice had taken flight—had vanished. Was this power to charm away dislike owing to pliant dexterity alone? Or was Oswald Langton, in some points, superior to his fellow-men? "It is indeed strange," thought Katherine, "how everything combines to facilitate what—if I had not cause to recoil from it for ever—I might have feared to set my heart on, from dread of the struggles to be gone through with all my relations on account of worldly shortcomings! And now I am not sure but that this man, little endowed as he is with the gifts of

fortune, might so win the favour of those around me, that they would give me to him—if I would let myself be given! Poor dear Annie, too—" but she would not let her reflections go on farther; for she was so conscious of the effect produced on her by her sister's account of her meeting with Oswald Langton, that she strove, with the whole force of her will, to drive its details from her mind. Still they recurred to her in spite of herself; and with them that deep emotion which she had found it so hard to conceal, while listening to her young sister's description of the man who had interested her so much, because "he loved Kate so!"

CHAPTER XIV.

On the morning after Annie's first run (which did not, as she averred, make her half so stiff as many a common ride), there came a letter from Shadworth, announcing the probable arrival, in the course of that afternoon, of Frederick Desborough. His stay with his family was not to extend beyond two or three days, and was to be a "leave-taking," preparatory to his starting for Italy, whither he was to proceed, under the guidance—in the company at least—of an "unexceptionable friend" of his late private tutor, to whose care he was to be consigned at the house of his uncle Herbert Desborough. It was agreed, in the family council at Wyngate, that no allusion should be made, during his stay, to the misadventure which had finally settled the doubtful question of his going, or not going, to the Continent. No advantage was likely to accrue from any spoken reproofs for an action of which more than enough was known, and of which he had been already made to feel some, at least, of the disagreeable consequences. There would be plenty to talk of on the subject of his journey now in prospect, and of his late visit

to the Langtons; and, besides other considerations, it was felt that this plan was by far the best adapted for the peaceful "going off" of "dear Fred's" visit.

He arrived in very good looks and spirits, not ill-pleased, on the whole, with his destination for the winter, though every now and then expressing himself as if he were making an unheard of sacrifice in giving up that season's hunting; and at times, speaking of the "leading strings he was still kept in" as of a humiliating restraint he showed great meekness in submitting to. He was a tall, slight youth, very like his sister Katherine in features and color, though very unlike her in countenance; for *his* expressed, not a proud reserve alternating with frank vivacity, but a haughty irritability which, though veiled—when under favourable circumstances—by the headlong mirth of a petted boy, seemed, to a watchful observer, ever ready to break out, on the first contradiction, from all bounds of manners and temper. When pleased with himself and his company, his bearing was courteous, and his conversation showed not only liveliness but considerable cultivation of mind; for, whether fortunately or unfortunately for himself, natural quickness had enabled him to learn and retain, at slight cost, much that he had assuredly spent no labour in acquiring; and as—though possessing too much tact to incur the reproach of impudence—he was in no company restrained by shyness,

he might well be deemed "precocious" in other respects than in the more confined (and less creditable) sense in which Spencer Langton had so denominated him. He was thus, while things ran smoothly, a far more attractive member of society than Spencer's brother Alexander; but his humour was less to be depended on, and as regards sense of duty, or self-command of any kind, the two might (as Mr. Oakly would have phrased it) have "run in a curricle." It would, however, have grievously offended Frederick's mother to have instituted any comparison; she was sincerely persuaded that he was as amiable in disposition as handsome in person, and laid every fault and folly he had ever committed, from the performances of his nursery days to his feat in the Kingsford theatre, successively at the door of servants, companions, teachers, guardians, friends; for all of these persons had (in her belief), either by direct bad examples or "ignorance of how to manage a boy of dear Fred's peculiarly sensitive nature," hindered his becoming the moral and intellectual "rara avis," as which he ought to have stepped forth amid the admiring world. As it was, she looked on him in the light of a kind of "Admirable Crichton;" and it is true that he possessed many outward and personal accomplishments corresponding to those ascribed to that phenomenon of learning and bodily dexterity, the account of whose triumphs in both departments

still dazzles some young imaginations. He had with his mother, according as it suited him, a coaxing or an imperiously off-hand demeanour, by which she was invariably either won or awed into submission. To his sister he had been in childhood a wayward, often a tyrannical playfellow; but, during the last year or two, she had found him a more agreeable companion, while he, on his part, proud of so handsome a sister, and fearing no rivalry in his mother's affections, thought it easier to show courtesy, and a certain amount of obligingness to her, than to any other member of his family. The perception of this naturally inspired her with a far more affectionate feeling towards Fred than could have been anticipated three years back; and the perception of the same by Mr. and Mrs. Oakly led to their deputing *her*, in the interim between Fred's arrival and the next hunting day, to insinuate to him the fact of its not being wished that he should show himself in any place so public as a hunting field. She acquitted herself of her delicate commission with tact and gentleness, and succeeded so well in dealing with her excitable brother, as for him to allow (after sundry ebullitions of wrath at "Oakly's stupid prejudice, and fancy to keep him incognito") "that perhaps it was as well not coming across the Daltons, or the Slannings, to be asked questions *he* had not the least objection to answer—not being ashamed to tell truth of him-

self—but which might lead to talks in that abominable neighbourhood, which might annoy his mother."

"So," continued he, in rather a sullen tone, "I shall have to sit at home to-morrow, while 'Miss Oakly' rides Gipsy after the hounds! a queer pass things are come to in this house!"

"Well, Fred, you know I am cut out of hunting too, and that for good and all; so you and I shall have to do penance together."

"It's very good of you, Kate," observed he, "to take Annie's going after the hounds in the way you do; to be sure I don't suppose you could prevent it; but it's kind of you anyhow. Don't you think they are going the way to make a proper goose of her? There she was telling me, just now, all the stuff Langton told *her* the other day, about her riding, and her likeness to you! when she has about as much the look of a sister of yours or mine as the black-and-tan terrier there! and so I told her."

"That was not a very kind speech, Fred."

"She's so cocky, and made so much of by her wise papa, that she requires a little pulling down. But what shall you and I do by way of penance to-morrow? Ride out in some safe direction, out of all chance of even encountering a stray hound? I suppose there are animals for us of some kind, though I have not brought any with me."

"I can ride Annie's old pony," said Katherine, "if you take my Blackberry; won't that do?"

And as Fred graciously admitted that it might, they next day, after seeing Annie start off with her father, in great spirits, even set forth on Blackberry and the old pony for a quiet ride.

"I confess I never thought to see 'one of *our* young ladies,' as old Cox says, being brought out in that style! But times change! and you and I, Kate, are a pair of old things of seventeen and twenty, just fit to exercise the horses that are not worthy to carry Princess Annie! Well, I don't mind for once in a way; and I have lots of things to ask you, and to talk over."

It appeared, nevertheless, that Fred had nothing particular to say just then; for a pause ensued; and it was not till they had ridden down the next lane, that he inquired of his sister, carelessly, "if she knew the Langton men?"

"I know the two eldest," she replied.

"That is," returned he, "Oswald and the married one, whom I have not seen. How do you like Oswald Langton?"

"I think him an agreeable man," answered Katherine.

"Well, yes, I suppose one would call him agreeable."

"Do not you like him?" asked she.

"My faint praise told a tale, I am afraid," said Fred, with something of a sneer. "Why, the truth is, I ought to like him, I presume, as there is no denying he did me a service; not but what I believe I could have fought through it myself,

better than they all think," added he, in a muttered tone; "yet, though I quite admit that he was of use, you know one can't always be desperately fond of one's benefactors."

"It is very unlucky—very unpleasant—when one feels that," observed his sister. "Did Mr. Langton make his services oppressive to you by anything overbearing or contemptuous in manner or speech?"

"No, I can't say he did that exactly; as to speech—he did not waste much on me. He had a sort of way with him I can't describe. It was as if he meant to say, 'I'll do your business for you, you young scamp, because you have been in our house lately, and my sister's a friend of your family, but that's just all I care for.'"

"Well, Fred, you don't much like being lectured or advised (few people do), so perhaps he thought it best to leave you alone to your reflections."

"I didn't want him to lecture me—one gets enough of that any how—and I see it's impossible to put the sort of thing exactly before you—(you would have *felt* it fast enough.) But I did want some one a trifle less high and dry to deal with, if I was to feel that overwhelming amount of gratitude some folks seem to think I must be affected with towards my preserver from the consequences of an unfortunate chance; for that is what the thing was—neither more nor less—a *most* unfortunate chance, I grant you; but not more than might have happened to anyone who does

not enjoy an exceptionally cool temper; might have befallen Mr. Oswald Langton himself, for he *can* be peppery enough, I believe."

"I am sorry for it all," said Katherine, "especially as I don't know anything more painful than being obliged to somebody ones does not like."

"Oh, as to that," returned Frederick, with a haughty curl of his lip, "the pain depends chiefly on one's own view of the measure of said obligation; and *I* don't look on that I have incurred as so unredeemable as, I daresay, our honored uncles do. Nor—to do him justice—do I think Langton himself regards me in the light of his 'debtor for life' (which Lewis Markham plainly said I was); but, without being precisely a prig, that Oswald contrives—in indifferent matters—to give you spices of his mind you could excuse, and which I don't see he is any way called on to bestow."

"How do you mean, Fred? Did he lecture his brother Alexander before you, in the sort of way that you might consider yourself included in the reproof?"

"Not exactly that, though it is something like. He *doesn't* lecture—Alexander says he never does—but he every now and then comes out with something that gives you to understand how remarkably cheap he holds you and your notions, without your being able to take it up in any way. Now, Alexander and I were one day talking—no matter of what—in a way that I suppose did not meet

with his unqualified approbation; so, without joining at all in our conversation, he just put forth his opinion 'that such plans might suit people who had no conscience; those who had any would find, sooner or later, that they didn't answer.'"

"If you were talking of anything wrong, Fred, what he said might be very true."

"I don't say it mightn't—not that what we were saying was in sober earnest—but if it had been, *he* had no right to testify in that sharp way—none at all, or I'm much mistaken! If dear old Cecy had said the same thing, I shouldn't have minded."

"You wouldn't, I daresay, have made the speeches you did before her."

"No—not just then—probably not. But how you do take his part, Kate!" observed Fred, impatiently.

"Why, you wouldn't have me say what I don't think?" cried his sister.

"No, but I should like you to—to—"

"To think the same as you, Fred?" interrupted she, smiling; "that would be far more correct and more pleasant, too, no doubt; only I can't always, any more than you can be always of my opinion; and you know you have not the taste to like my new bonnet, or to approve of all I say and do, by any means as I consider you ought."

"Can't be helped, Kate!" said he, recovering his good humour; "can't be helped on either side! I was just explaining to you why I am not

quite so fond of Oswald Langton's company as it might be supposed I should be. I'm so thankful my mother doesn't want to send me over to the Moat! I daresay *you* never saw Langton under the sort of colors he has sometimes exhibited in for my benefit."

"I certainly never saw him the least inclined to 'testify,' as you call it; I should not have supposed it to have been in his nature; but I fancy Alexander gives a great deal of trouble, and *that* makes elder brothers bristle up, very naturally."

"I have only an elder sister, thank Heaven!" said Frederick, gaily," and she is very bearable, on the whole, so long as she does not take to preaching! Remember that, Kate, my dear! But to return to what we were talking of, there's really no harm in Alexander Langton, only those old fellows at Oxford make such a fuss if any one breaks through their stupid rules; and as to his being a trifle in debt—which his family complain of so—he would do very well if they didn't keep him so short; a man can't be expected to do at all upon what they are pleased to allow him."

"The Langtons are anything but rich for their station," observed Katherine.

"Not exactly rich—very likely not; and I know Shadworth is not their own—just a convenient place they take on from year to year; but they are better off than the old governor chooses to give out, you may depend on that! I take it he is a close one; though he's a pleasant old fellow

enough to stay with; his closeness doesn't go the way of grudging wine or horse keep, and he takes far less notice of what you happen to say or think, than his eldest son does. It's agreeable, on the whole, to be at Shadworth; Cecy is always kind, and doesn't think me worth scolding; she and I get on capitally; so, as I'm very thick with Alexander, and he and I rode into Kingsford every day, and met lots of fellows we knew; I didn't find it bad quarters by any means."

"Does Cecilia ever ride now?" asked Katherine.

"Sometimes; not that I ever went with her; but she rode once or twice with her pet brother Oswald and Lewis Markham—those two are great cronies."

"Who? which of them?"

"Oswald Langton and Markham; and they are grave and grim enough for each other, to be sure."

A turnip cart just issuing from a field, and standing rather awkwardly across the road, here checked the progress of the riders, and caused them a delay, which, though of short duration, sufficed to ruffle the temper of the arrogant boy for some minutes. When his indignation against "that senseless brute of a carter" had subsided, and they were again riding quietly forwards, he observed, that if he had understood his mother rightly, he might expect to see Isabella Walpole—Lady Carew, rather—when he got to Florence.

"But all this time," continued he, "I have forgotten to ask you, Kate, how you got on with your

dear friend in Paris, and what you and she did with the old fellow you were so angry with her for marrying? How you ever got over it enough to go and stay with her is what I cannot understand! though I believe I do partly—for, really, things are so preternaturally dull here, that if one mightn't hunt, I suppose one *would* feel rather desperate. And so you were glad to get away—in spite of poor Bella's iniquities?"

"Well, I believe it was something of the kind," replied Katherine, quietly, while inwardly racking her brain for some subject, the starting of which might divert Fred from this, the most hateful of all; and hopeless of anything better, she was just going to hazard a remark upon some gipsies they had just passed, when Fred began afresh:

"I was quite a little fellow when you and she were such inseparables; but I remember thinking her very beautiful *then*—I shall like to come across her again. Now, would you believe it," continued he, after a momentary pause, "when I just asked Langton, the other day, 'if she was a real clever hand at bamboozling her old gentleman?' he looked as black as November, and actually had the insolence to put me off with the kind of answer one gives a child of five years old that asks troublesome questions! I should like to have asked him what he took *me* for? And then, if he had knocked me down—or tried, at any rate—we should have been quits, and I shouldn't be 'obliged to be obliged' to him. But I was very meek and submissive, I assure you;

and didn't even say 'he was welcome to be as sternly decorous as he pleased, since I could hear all I wanted at home!' So, Miss Kate, out with it! Is your fair-haired friend a great larker? and did you lark with her for company? I shan't tell of you!"

Between joke and earnest, Katherine was able to manage so well, and generalize so much, as to escape giving any precise, or pointedly distinct answers; and she was also able to refrain from bestowing any positive praise on Lady Carew, beyond that which she undoubtedly deserved, for her pleasing manners, agreeable conversation, and great kindness and hospitality to herself. Luckily Fred's curiosity concerning Lady Carew, though aroused and sharpened by the feeling that Oswald Langton had endeavoured to baffle it, was not very deep-seated; and he soon allowed his sister to turn her account of her Paris adventures from the Carews themselves, to general descriptions of public places, operas, ballets, theatres, etc. On these subjects she was able to keep up a pretty lively conversation; and she finished her morning's ride, glad to have avoided embarrassing investigations, as well as thankful not to have had to listen to Fred's remarks on Oswald Langton in the presence of her observant little sister.

When Annie came home in the afternoon, she was, if possible, more enchanted with her day's hunting, and with herself, than on the previous occasion; but she did not seek for any "tête-à-tête"

with Katherine, and it was only on the following morning that, being accidentally alone with her for a few minutes in the school-room, she said:

"I suppose, Kate, you would sooner die than ask me if I met—you know whom?"

"Then, *I* suppose, Annie, that you mean Mr. Langton, and that—as he had promised to be in the field yesterday—he *was* there?"

"Yes, but people don't always keep their promises, you know; and I doubt if he would have kept his, if he had expected me to be so particular (as indeed I was, Kate!) not to say a word more than was quite necessary, to all he asked me about your way of spending your time, and tastes, and fancies, and all that. I do believe he must have pretty nearly guessed the real truth! for he said something about my having acquired 'so much discretion,' since the other day; and he didn't keep by my side like last time at all (not that it signified to me, for I had Richard Slanning all the while), and I heard him say to another gentleman (heard Mr. Langton say, I mean), just as we were dispersing to ride home, that he should leave the Moat in a day or two, and England soon after. Then I couldn't help saying (dont be angry, Kate, for really the words slipped out of my mouth before I could think!), I couldn't help saying, 'Oh dear, what can that be for? when you had settled to spend the season, hunting in the Kingsford country and this!'

"'So I had,' said he, 'and I might still; but

one's plans don't always depend solely on one's self, Miss Oakly,' and he looked very gravely and significantly at me, while Richard Slanning said: 'I should have thought *you* were independent, if anyone is, Langton;' and then he said a something about 'everyone's knowing his own concerns,' but as he rode away, he added, 'I don't think I shall leave my brother's this week, however.' Now Kate, are you terribly angry? Do look up and say something! for I can't bear your sitting there like a statue."

"No, Annie dear, I am not angry; for I do believe that, as you say, you 'couldn't help' exclaiming in the way you did—no, I am not angry; but I wish the man had never gone near the Moat!"

"You look sadly unhappy, Kate! and I don't know exactly why; but so that you are not displeased with me, it's the chief thing; and I don't think he'll be out with the hounds next time."

This observation did not, for whatever cause, seem to produce any consolatory effect, for two large tears stood in Katherine's eyes, as she kissed Annie, who was only prevented from inquiring what might be their spring, by the entrance of her governess, on whose appearance her sister left the school-room.

"How glad I *ought* to be," thought she, as she walked away, "of the security against farther trial, which his probable return to the Continent affords me! And yet . . . ."

She would, perhaps, have given way to the feeling that now seized her, and consciously bewailed the departure, the self-banishment of the lover she had rejected; but she heard Fred's voice calling her, and knew she must force herself into an appearance of spirits, as this was his last day at home, and he expected to be attended to, and helped to collect his "things," of all sorts, with even more zeal than he usually exacted from those he condescended to honour with his regard.

Next morning came his actual departure; it was an hour of great and grievous sorrow to Mrs. Oakly; but more so from the privation of not seeing her son for some five or six months, and the dread lest he might be "taken ill abroad," than from any defined alarm at other dangers he might be exposed to. With Katherine it was otherwise; she had more knowledge of the world at twenty, than her mother possessed at eight-and-thirty; and though sensible of the desirableness of her brother's quitting England on some accounts, she was so well aware of other perils to be set against those left behind, as to raise within her an anxiety which rendered her farewell to him very different to any she had ever bid him before. "God grant you come back safe every way, my dear Fred!" murmured she, as he embraced her.

"Why shouldn't I, Kate? You are grown as bad as my mother!" was his parting ejaculation, as he gave her a last kiss; after bestowing which,

and being once more clasped in his mother's arms, he mounted and disappeared.

The house seemed not only dull but melancholy for the next few days; as, though his visit had not been calculated—all things considered—to afford unmingled pleasure to those interested in him, still he was lively and talkative, good-humoured when not contradicted or checked, and so far an agreeable inmate as that his absence caused a considerable blank in an establishment like Wyngate.

Annie's next hunting day was the first event that occurred to diversify existence as concerned *her;* for Katherine's ear received no echo of the sport, in the shape of accounts of what Oswald Langton said or did. Either he had not been to be seen, or Annie did not choose to mention him without being asked, which Kate was determined not to do. On the other hand, she heard more of fences leaped over, of compliments paid by Richard Slanning, and of expressions of wonder uttered by Mr. Templeton (the master of the hounds) at sight of Miss Oakly's equestrian prowess, than she could easily stretch her patience to listen to.

"Annie is getting downright spoilt!" said she to herself; "yet it is better she should tell all this stuff to me than to Margaret; so I suppose it is a sort of duty to be good-natured and sympathising."

In the course of the next day or two, she discovered, through something said at dinner, that, whether Langton had or had not been out with the

hounds, he was supposed to be still at the Moat by Mr. Oakly, who now appeared so resolved to call on him there shortly, that Katherine again felt she must make up her mind, before he did so, to tell her mother the plain fact of the proposal she had received, and rejected. She however hoped, as this visit was certainly not to be paid till after the next day's hunting, that it might become known in the field to Annie, and to Mr. Oakly, that Langton had now actually left the Moat; and she therefore awaited their return on the afternoon of her sister's fourth experience of the pleasures of the chase, with no small anxiety.

CHAPTER XV.

After driving out in the britchska with Mrs. Oakly, and getting rid of her bonnet and wraps in her own chamber, Katherine was proceeding, just as it was growing dusk, to join her mother by the drawing-room fire, when a maidservant met her in the passage, telling her, in that mysterious tone which always alarms, "that there was a gentleman wanting to see her in Mr. Oakly's study." During her progress towards this apartment, which was on the contrary side of the house to the drawing-room, she inquired who "the gentleman" was? and was answered that "James said he was a stranger to him, and he hadn't given his name; but," continued the maid, whose imagination was evidently alive to the possibility of an impostor's having penetrated into the mansion, "I'll stand just outside, Miss, and Williams is in the pantry, within call."

A very different kind of alarm—a dread of something having befallen Annie—took possession of Katherine, when, on opening the door, she saw by the fire-light the figure of a man in a hunting coat, whose back was towards her as she entered.

"Is my sister hurt?" exclaimed she, eagerly.

"Not dangerously," replied Oswald Langton, coming forward, for he was "the gentleman waiting for her." "Not dangerously, I give you my word," repeated he, as he noticed that her terror rather increased than diminished. "Your sister was thrown in consequence of her horse's stumbling, as she was riding home, just by Milehead; she has been carried into a cottage there. Mr. Newman has seen her, and says there is neither fracture nor injury of any material kind; but, as you may imagine, the carriage is required to convey her from Milehead here; and Mr. Oakly begged me to see you, rather than Mrs. Oakly, on account of her extreme nervousness."

"He was quite right," answered she; "poor mamma would go out of her senses if she heard this before *seeing* that Annie is alive, at least! Thank God it is no worse! Is she sensible, Mr. Langton?"

"Perfectly so, and suffering chiefly from her knowledge of the alarm likely to be created here. But will you give the necessary orders, Miss Desborough?"

"Oh yes, thank you for reminding me!" cried she; and calling to the maid who stood sentinel without, she told her quickly what had happened, bidding her get ready to go in the carriage to Milehead, and laying her commands on her, not to let any knowledge of what was passing reach her mistress. She then flew out into the yard by the

back entrance, near which Langton's horse stood smoking, to tell the coachman to put to again that instant, and having done so, hastened back to the study, when, seized with a renewed fear that after all something was being concealed from her, she besought Langton "to make her aware of the *real truth;* for," proceeded she, "if Annie is indeed no worse than you said, the best thing I can do is to sit here with mamma and keep talking to her till the carriage comes back, but if—if—you know if it were different, cost what it might, I should tell mamma, and we should go in the carriage to see her once more! Tell the whole truth, I implore you!"

"Indeed, Miss Desborough, I have done so already; you are not a person with whom I could be tempted to a pious fraud; and I sincerely believe your best course will be that you proposed, of going immediately to sit with Mrs. Oakly, till the carriage comes back with your sister in it. I will explain to your coachman the precise part of Milehead he must drive to, and you shall not be longer detained by a messenger of ill news."

"Oh, I am so much obliged to you for your kindness," cried she; "but I ought to make haste to mamma, and you will tell them, I am sure, at Milehead, that the carriage is coming the moment it can."

She gave him her hand as she spoke; he shook it warmly, but did not attempt to retain it in his, and they parted; he to remount his tired hunter in

the yard, she to betake herself, with as composed a demeanor as she could assume, to the drawing-room, where her mother sat listlessly in an arm-chair near the fire, asking her daughter, as she came in, what had made her so long taking off her things?

Katherine evaded the question, and began talking, with what heart she could, of Fred, of his probably crossing the Channel that day, of how much time he was likely to spend in Paris, etc.; and her mother, always willing to listen when her eldest son was the subject of discourse, neither recurred to her daughter's delay in joining her, nor took notice, for some time, of how unusually late and dark it had grown for Annie to be still out. To Katherine, it appeared even more so than to her mother. She knew the carriage could scarcely be back from Milehead within an hour from its setting out; yet she caught herself listening for the sound of returning wheels, when it had been hardly ten minutes gone. She taxed her imagination to the utmost to find reasons why the hunting party should be late that day, and used them to tranquillize Mrs. Oakly, even while she was herself beginning to tremble lest some fresh disaster should have befallen.

At long last, after what seemed more like the space of three hours than one, and when Mrs. Oakly's anxiety was getting quite beyond her powers of calming it, the sound of the opening of the back hall door struck her ear.

"There they are!" cried she; "but it's too cold for you, mamma, in those passages; I will go and see what has kept them."

And so saying, she hurried to the stable entrance, where, by the light of a lamp in the courtyard, she saw Mr. Newman and Langton assisting Annie out of the carriage (from which the maid had already descended), and then the latter carrying her into the hall, while Mr. Oakly stood by with a somewhat helplessly agitated look.

"Take me to the drawing-room," said Annie faintly to her bearer; "Kate will show you the way."

Accordingly, Katherine ran back to her mother, telling her, in as quiet a tone as she could command, "that they were come; but that Annie had been a little hurt, which was why Mr. Langton had joined them."

As she finished these words, and, luckily, before Mrs. Oakly had had time to scream, Annie herself appeared, pale indeed, and with a torn habit, but standing, though with one hand on the door post and the other on Langton's arm. Katherine pushed the nearest chair to her; she sank upon it, but strung herself up to say cheerfully, as her mother and sister threw their arms round her:

"I have no bones broken, mamma; and it wasn't done in leaping!"

The effort she had made to walk, however (she had insisted on being set down just outside the drawing-room door), and the subsequent exertion

of speaking in her usual tone, were too much for strength which had been already over-tried, and she fainted away. The room was immediately filled with an anxious crowd; for not only Mr. Oakly, Mr. Newman, and the maid who had gone in the carriage to Milehead, but one or two other servants, together with the governess and some of the children, thronged in to look at Annie; at sight of whose colorless and motionless form, so much alarm was excited, that Mrs. Oakly, always additionally acted on by the terror of those around her, was nearly in hysterics. By degrees the two or three rational members of the party were able to do what was required for Annie's recovery, and when she at length gave signs of life, and unclosed her eyes, Katherine and Mr. Newman took upon themselves to send everyone, but her parents and Langton, out of the room, in which she was to remain till her own apartment was got ready for her. Mr. Oakly now, as if waking out of a dream, introduced Langton to his wife, telling her that he did not know what he should have done without him, and that he hardly knew if (but for his help) he and Annie should have got home that night at all."

It seemed that the accident had happened as he and his daughter were crossing a common on the other side of Milehead, just as they had parted from Langton, who had turned his horse's head in the direction of the Moat. "But luckily," said Mr. Oakly, "he was within hearing of a halloo

from me, when Annie fell, and as it was out of the question putting her on Gipsy again, he carried her to Grimshaw's cottage, and then galloped to Thackeridge for Newman, coming on here afterwards to speak to Kate and get the carriage sent. That animal of yours," continued he, addressing Langton, "will never carry you home to-night, it's thoroughly knocked up; so you had better dine and sleep here."

Langton excused himself on the ground of fearing to alarm his brother and sister-in-law by not appearing; and, on Mr. Oakly's pressing him again, Katherine interfered with the offer of her horse, Blackberry, "which was," she believed, "the only fresh one in the stable, to take him home and prevent all alarm at the Moat, while his worn-out steed would rest that night in Blackberry's stall."

"Many thanks, Miss Desborough, your proposal removes every difficulty," replied he, with a scarcely perceptible emphasis on the last words, and a momentary look of reproach at Katherine, "I accept it gladly; only," he continued, "you must expect to see me bring Blackberry back myself to-morrow, as I have no one else whom I could trust, both to take him home and to convey me a distinct account of your sister."

Kate's heart smote her for lack of kindness to the man who had just been so actively serviceable to one most dear to her, and she exclaimed, warmly:

"Oh I can't bear your having such a long, dark ride, after all your trouble for us!"

"I have no fear of the dark," said he, smiling, "and though my poor grey is tired, *I* am not. I meant to have walked home to the Moat, but am much obliged for the means of getting there an hour or two sooner; still, as I shall be late even as it is, I will not—unless I could be of any farther use here—delay starting at once."

Mr. Oakly allowed that "if he must go, he was right not to lose time," and left the room himself to see Miss Desborough's horse saddled for his guest, as well as to give directions about the grey's accommodation; while Langton, after taking leave of Mrs. Oakly and Mr. Newman, shook Annie warmly by the hand, but was about to pass Kate without presuming to touch hers, when she offered it, and he said, as he pressed it for a moment, "I shan't let Blackberry throw me."

When the door had closed on him, Annie whispered to her sister, who was bending over her to raise one of the cushions on which she was lying, "You cruel, ungrateful thing!" and then raising her voice, she added, "You don't know, mamma, how very kind and gentle Mr. Langton was in everything he did for me! if it had been Cecilia herself, it couldn't have been better."

"Well, my dear, he is Cecilia's brother; and—though I hardly looked at him—I have been so upset and flurried—he seems a most gentlemanlike,

quiet person—not that I think him like her. But here's your father come back, and Margaret to say your bed is ready; I am sure Mr. Newman will kindly help to take you in a chair upstairs, and then we can try to make you really comfortable."

Between them, Annie was soon conveyed to her room, where, after a more thorough examination of her sprains, it was decided that—although no mischief had been done of which the ill effects might not be averted, with care—she must resign herself to lie in bed for several days, at all events; must not think of walking for some time to come; "and must be kept as quiet as possible, to avoid risk of fever."

Annie sighed on hearing this sentence, but was, in fact, beginning to feel much too weak and ill to attempt any resistance, even in words, to the decree. Katherine wished to sit up with her—to pass the first half of the night in her room at least—but was prohibited, chiefly because the nurse told Mrs. Oakly that "if Miss Annie had Miss Desborough with her at night, there wouldn't be a wink of sleep for either of the young ladies, they *did* talk so when alone together! Not," added Mrs. Cox, candidly, "that it's Miss Desborough's fault, ma'am; but, ill or well, Miss Oakly *will* talk and be talked to, except she has got somebody with her that she minds, like me or Miss Freeman." The result was, that Cox sat up with "Miss Oakly," who said, in a low voice, to her sister, as she received her good-night kiss:

"Perhaps it's as well, Kate, that they won't let you stay here, for I suppose we should argue all night, and so be scolded in the morning; but mind, I hate ingratitude, and all ungrateful people! Remember that, Kate, and behave accordingly."

Katherine only answered with a tender embrace, and left the room, to frame, on the text of these last words, as complete a "pro" and "con" discussion, in her own mind, as she could have had with her sister, and one which, as regarded herself, was quite as little calculated to promote repose.

Kate's protracted wakefulness did not, however, interfere with her early rising, for she was up before dawn, to glide into Annie's chamber and learn how she had passed the night. She was told, in whispers (for her sister was now asleep), that she had been for some hours feverish and restless, though not more so than was, in fact, to be expected, but had dropped into a quiet slumber towards morning, and "the longer it lasted," said Cox, "the better it would be for her." Katherine returned to her room, whence, after she was dressed, she again repaired to Annie's door, to listen if all were still silent there. No sound reached her; and she was directing her steps towards her mother's room, to ask if she might not now take Cox's place by Annie's side, when, as she was passing by an open window, in the long corridor that looked down into the stable yard, she heard the clatter of horses' hoofs beneath. She put her head out to see whether it were the

butcher's boy, or Mr. Newman come early to visit his still sleeping patient, and beheld, not the rough, bony nag, laden with joints of beef and mutton, nor yet the medical man, on his steady brown pony, but Oswald Langton, on Blackberry, gazing up to her with as joyfully animated a countenance as he had worn the day she met him in the porch of his brother's house.

"I have brought him home safe, Miss Desborough," cried he, patting the glossy neck of the pretty creature from which he had now just dismounted. "How has your sister slept? and what does Mr. Newman say to her this morning?"

"Mr. Newman is not come yet," answered she, "but Annie is asleep now, so we hope . . . "

She was interrupted by her mother's voice, saying:

"Oh, Kate! how can you stand at that open window!"

"I was speaking to Mr. Langton, mamma, who is come to inquire about Annie."

"Mr. Langton! so early! that is very kind!" exclaimed Mrs. Oakly, drawing a shawl close about her, as she, in spite of her dread of the chill morning air, showed herself for a moment at the window to entreat Langton "would come in directly, she had so much to say to him!"

Having hastily pulled down the sash, she went downstairs, and Katherine, who remained on the landing-place above, heard her exclaim, as she shook hands in the hall with her early guest:

"I can't tell you, Mr. Langton, how ashamed I felt the moment you were gone! I don't know what you can have thought of me! but it's always my way; I can't say anything when I am overcome as I was—and it seems so stupid!"

"It's very kind of you to suppose there was anything to say," was the reply. "How is Miss Oakly this morning?"

"Why, poor dear, she has not had quite the night we could have wished; but they tell me it is no more than was to be expected, so we shouldn't despond; and oh, Mr. Langton, she is so grateful for your kindness!"

"She is grateful for very little," answered he; "I only wish I could have done more."

But Mrs. Oakly went on to repeat, word for word, Annie's speech of the evening before, with a pathos which showed how eagerly she was impelled to make every possible amends for any lack of courtesy of which her preoccupation of the preceding day had rendered her guilty.

Langton now began to take leave, saying "his grey must be ready for him now—he had not intended to disturb any of the family—merely to inquire after Miss Oakly, and deposit Blackberry with many thanks, which he hoped Mrs. Oakly would kindly transmit."

"Oh, I'm sure Kate was too happy—and if you are really going, Mr. Langton, do remember her and me kindly to your brother and Mrs. Spencer Langton! I know you will excuse me,

Mr. Langton, for you are so very kind, and can feel for what I was going through yesterday; but do you know, I hardly even remembered, till you had left us, that you were dear Cecilia's brother, and had been of such unspeakable service to my poor Fred! and though Mr. Oakly has said everything that . . . ."

"Pray don't speak of it," interrupted Langton. "If you will allow me, I'll call, some time tomorrow, to hear how Miss Oakly gets on;" and he was really returning into the yard to mount his grey, when Mr. Oakly, coming out of his dressing-room, stopped him, ordered the grey back into the stable, and pronounced his wife "a master hand at losing her friends, since she let them ride off again the moment they were come."

Mrs. Oakly declared herself "*so* glad Mr. Langton would stay! she had thought he was in some great hurry!" and Katherine, who had stood listening from the head of the stairs, now perceiving that there was no chance of the visitor's departure for one while, even came down and joined the rest in the dining-room, when Mr. Oakly begged her to be quick and make the tea, if she meant anybody ever to have breakfast that morning. She obeyed accordingly; but having done so, asked permission to go and relieve guard in Annie's room.

"If you like, my dear," said Mrs. Oakly; "but I have sent Margaret in already to take Cox's

place, and she is to ring the moment dear Annie wakes."

"Then I'll wait till then," replied Katherine, now repenting of having perhaps shown a too great readiness to avoid the presence of their guest, who, without either particularly addressing her, or yet shunning her eye, went on talking to Mr. and Mrs. Oakly about his sister, about the Moat, about various mutual acquaintances, in a manner which betokened his desire to be friends with them, and which promised—as she saw by their looks—to win him, before long, any amount of favour he might desire.

Mrs. Oakly, with all her indolent nervous shrinking from new acquaintance, was not only quite sensible to the agreeable break in a dull existence made by a pleasant companion, but was liable, at times, to take a violent fancy to one into whose company she had been originally forced, and to shun whom she would have done and suffered much, so long as he, or she, bore the dreaded name of stranger. Langton's relationship to Cecilia facilitated matters immensely on the present occasion, as it led Mrs. Oakly to assume that he knew, and was interested in, everything and person that concerned his sister's friend; which impression afforded her all the ease which she was apt to feel the want of at a first introduction. Mr. Oakly was always disposed to like a man whom he saw to be a good rider, and had heard of as a good shot; so that it was matter of course that he should

be pleased with one who added those accomplishments to the services he had done Fred and Annie; but Katherine observed, with a feeling of apprehensive surprise, the air of affectionate approbation with which her mother, usually cold and discouraging in manner, even to friends, now looked at and listened to Langton. By the time her own breakfast was nearly over, the bell rang from Annie's room.

"Let me go, mamma," said Katherine, starting up, "for I am quite done, and if you are the least wanted I'll call you."

She was permitted to depart, but Langton said aloud, as he opened the door for her:

"Remember me to my little friend!" adding, in a lower voice, "my *great* friend, I think I ought to call your sister."

Katherine hurried up stairs, and found Annie flushed and complaining of headache, but not the less anxious to know "*who* was downstairs?—for Margaret thought there was some one—not Mr. Newman—at breakfast with papa and mamma."

When satisfied on this point, she began hoping Kate "had behaved well; for," said she, "it can't surely do any harm, can't deceive any one, that you should say, in my name, and for me, all I should say for myself, if I were but downstairs! I wonder when I shall get down, though! I'm afraid I'm not so much better as I had hoped to be this morning."

"Dear Annie, lie still, and don't chatter so! I promise you that it shan't be my fault if your gratitude is not fully expressed. I'll say anything you please for *you* to Mr. Langton."

"For *me!*—yes. Well, I suppose that is all you can do; but if you had heard the way in which he answered, when papa and I said, yesterday, after he had ridden here and back to Milehead, how sorry we were for his trouble; if you had heard him tell us 'he would gladly have had twenty times as much for the same end,' in a tone that came so from his very heart, I don't think, my dear Kate, that you would keep on being such a piece of ice! For, you know, though I see he is most kind and humane, and would, I'm sure, have actually *done* as much to help me if there were no such thing as you; still, what he meant then was the 'end' of seeing you, and of serving what belongs to you; and when papa went, a minute after, to the door of Grimshaw's cottage, to see if the carriage was coming, Mr. Langton bent down to me and whispered, 'that he had been rewarded for what I called his trouble, for he had seen you looking more beautiful than ever!' but I don't think he meant me to tell you that."

"So you take pains to repeat it the first opportunity!" replied her sister, smiling. "But do you know, Annie, that I am supposed to excite you by my talk—so, as I can't tell them that it is you who *will* talk about exciting things, it will just be that

they won't allow me to come up and sit with you by day, any more than by night."

"Then I suppose I must be quiet," said Annie, disconsolately; "but I believe I have told you all I wanted to tell, except that you must give Mr. Langton my love, and ask him—from *me*, you know—whether Blackberry carried him nicely, and whether the grey is all right after his night's rest?"

Here she was fortunately interrupted by the entrance of her mother, who, glancing at her heated cheeks, and then at Katherine, gave it as her opinion, that the latter "did not know how to talk to an invalid," and desired her to go down, and wait till Mr. Newman came, when she was "to let *her* know instantly."

Katherine did go down, intending to wait in the library; but, as she was passing the drawing-room door, met with Mr. Oakly and Langton, who had just been taken over the stables.

"Kate," said Mr. Oakly, "I am going up to see Annie; but I have persuaded Langton (as he is kind enough to take so much interest) to stay till we have heard Newman's opinion about her; so I consign him to you till our doctor comes, which must be before many minutes are over."

As he spoke, he pushed the drawing-room door open for them, and went upstairs, leaving, in a "tête-à-tête," two persons, of whom it would be difficult to say which felt the most deadly embarrass-

ment at being left alone with the other. Langton, however, though the effort with which he did it was sufficiently visible at first, entered into conversation immediately, with an inquiry about Annie; which, being courteously responded to, he proceeded to such praises of his "little friend's fortitude, and consideration for others in the midst of her own sufferings," as went a good way to dissolve the barrier of circumspection with which Katherine had surrounded herself; and farther resulted in a much more faithful recapitulation of Annie's tender messages about the horses, than she would have (deliberately) granted to him.

"You may tell your sister," replied Langton, "that the grey she is kind enough to be interested in seems thoroughly refreshed by his night's rest, and ready to do such another day's work at a moment's notice. As to Blackberry," continued he, "it is a capital little horse, and took me quicker to the Moat than my own would, when freshest; but—I don't know why (I somehow anticipated it)—he had a great mind not to take me there at all, or to leave me in the road, as Gipsy did your sister; however, as I told you, I did not mean to let him. I conclude he was not pleased with the change of weight on his back; but before we had gone two miles, he and I understood each other perfectly. This morning, of course, he knew he was coming home to his mistress."

"And to his stable!" observed Katherine,

smiling; "but I am sorry he was was not on his best of behaviour last night, as he would have been, were he gifted with any sense of duty."

"I don't think the worse of him for not liking to be transferred," said Langton; "neither brutes nor men (that are worth anything) can bear changing their allegiance, even when not particularly favoured—how much less when they are!"

A pause of several moments ensued, that was broken by some inquiry of Katherine's, relating to Mrs. Spencer Langton, the answer to which—made the most of, and dilated on—just served to carry on the conversation till Mr. Newman's arrival. Upon his appearance, Katherine ran upstairs to tell her mother, and was thus released from a situation she had dreaded beyond speech, but which she was glad to have "got over," as she thought she should "mind it less another time," more especially as she was now satisfied that Langton did *not* think himself licensed to take advantage of chance opportunities, for the pressing of his rejected suit.

Mr. Newman's opinion of Annie was by no means unfavorable in itself, but was accompanied by such charges against "excitement" and over-interesting talk or reading—from one or other of which causes he was persuaded she had already suffered—that not only was an embargo laid on "Kenilworth" and on the "White Doe of Rylstone" (both which he had detected on the patient's bed); but it was also decreed that, for the next few days,

Miss Desborough might not sit for above a quarter of an hour with her sister, and that only on the condition neither to talk of hunting, nor novels, nor poetry, nor any subject on which Miss Oakly was considered "excitable."

This ukase being repeated, after Mr. Newman was gone, with solemn emphasis by Mrs. Oakly to her husband and to Langton, the latter said, turning to Katherine, who stood by, half amused and half disconcerted:

"I see, Miss Desborough, you are not thought good company for young people."

"I suppose not," replied she, "but you perceive I only come under the same ban as Scott and Wordsworth."

"And you comfort yourself on a ground that comforts many folks! but I suspect," continued he, in a lower voice, "that the doctor is right, and that you say very sophisticating things to my little friend. I shall tell her to try and convert *you!*"

"I don't think I am in the habit of saying anything sophistical," replied Katherine, aloud, and quite audibly to Mr. Oakly, who said:

"No, no, that's not Kate's way, whosever it is; but I do believe she and Annie *are* too much for each other, when either is not quite the thing."

Langton looked embarrassed for a second, then observed, carelessly, "that he believed Miss Desborough knew what he meant," and took his leave, repeating "that he should call in the course of tomorrow."

Mr. Oakly followed him into the hall to bid him come about luncheon time if he could, as then he would be sure to find Mrs. Oakly, if not himself;" while his wife exclaimed to her daughter:

"You never told me, Kate, what an uncommonly delightful person Oswald Langton is!"

"Well, mamma, it would be difficult to say how it was, or why, but I didn't think him half so agreeable in Paris as here; I thought him more so at the Moat, and in this house I am sure I don't wonder at his pleasing you."

"Ah, I suppose the kind of life abroad did not suit him; there are many people it does not; I daresay he was not seen to advantage among that gay set; did not feel as he does in his own country."

"That is what he was always harping on," thought Katherine; but she said no more, and her mother soon left her to return to Annie's apartment.

CHAPTER XVI.

NOTWITHSTANDING the gradual diminution of pain and swelling, there was not, for two or three days, so much improvement in the invalid, generally, as she herself had expected and everyone wished; but after that time her amendment was steady, in all respects; and she was allowed to leave her bed, though not as yet to put her feet to the ground, or even to be carried downstairs. Oswald Langton called every day for more than a week, and was always welcomed, both by the master and mistress of the house, in a manner to make him feel literally "at home" in it. Katherine's demeanour was such that a bystander would have been puzzled to determine whether it betokened repressed annoyance, or an overpowering consciousness of pleasure at his visits. He himself was at one moment cast down by the former, at another elated by the latter impression; but though conversing freely with her, and sometimes tête-à-tête, he did not make any definite attempt to ascertain if her feelings had undergone a change, while she, every day saying to herself, "that she ought to have an explanation with her mother,"

felt every day that it would be more and more painful to do so.

"If I had never been in Paris," thought she, "I might have returned his love, and then I should be free to give myself up to the sense of all he deserves from us, for saving Fred from disgrace, and for his great kindness about Annie! But if I had not been in Paris," proceeded she, mentally, while a kind of shudder passed over her, "if I had not been in Paris, *he* would not be in England! He would be abroad still—and—with whom? that is what I must remember, *that* is what I must never lose sight of, when I am most tempted to doubt the duty—the necessity—of keeping my resolution."

Yet even while strengthening herself in this attempt, her mind was apt to busy itself with all those things that presented Oswald Langton in a favorable light. The very dislike which her haughty, irritable brother avowed for the man who had served him, had (incidentally) brought confirmation of all she had been told of the esteem in which he was generally held, and of the friendship entertained for him by that Lewis Markham, of whose high character and steady principle she had heard through life, and never so much as during the last three months. The whole grew more and more puzzling to her apprehension; and the contradictions involved appeared beyond the usual contradictions of human nature, and human fate. Could it be—might it be—that that which

she had hitherto accepted as a hideous but incontrovertible truth, was *not* indeed truth? That which *she* believed of Langton, the world believed of another; but no—she would not wilfully deceive herself—it would be folly, sin, to sophisticate her understanding, merely to justify the growing weakness with which she shrank from the confession that could alone extricate her from a situation in which right feeling and inclination were so utterly opposed to each other.

Mrs. Oakly was not merely friendly and grateful to Oswald Langton, but growing actually attached to him; and her daughter could, moreover, see that she occasionally cast looks of serene satisfaction on her, and on their guest, almost simultaneously, in a manner for which she could only conceive one interpretation. Nor was she mistaken; for scarce four days after Annie's accident, Mrs. Oakly confessed to her husband that she had never seen a man with whom she should so much like to match Kate, as this "brother of dear Cecilia's. I wonder," said she, "if he admires her at all!"

"I should just imagine he did," replied Mr. Oakly, "or he would hardly come here, day after day, and stay so long as he does, out of sheer and mere interest in Annie's sprains. You would hardly have asked the question if you had seen him looking after her as she rode off with the Selwyns to-day! But it's no use, for the Desboroughs would never hear of such a thing. No

money to speak of among the Langtons, you know."

"I am not quite so sure the Desboroughs would be against it," replied his wife; "Herbert Desborough was, for him, quite taken with Oswald Langton; and though they did object so to poor Lewis Markham (before his uncle's death), still, I somehow think that they wouldn't look on this as exactly the same."

"I suppose you mean, my dear, that they haven't the same prejudice against a man who is not a cousin of mine, and there may be something in that, I allow; but still they do expect money for Kate."

"Well," said Mrs. Oakly, lowering her voice mysteriously, "the truth is, Cecilia has told me, more than once, that she believes, from things which have escaped her father, that though he would never do anything 'to encourage imprudence,' as he calls it—that is, add, in his life-time, to the allowance of a son who marries in the way Spencer has done—still he has the power, and would have the will, under *some* circumstances—to do more. Now Cecilia never speaks without some ground to go on; so, as Oswald is the favorite, as well as the eldest son, and as—of course—when we came to talk on business, Mr Langton would be told, not only what Kate has at present, but what she is to have ultimately, through Aunt Judith, I do suppose he would make every effort to smooth matters with her uncles; and it is my belief, too,

that what he would come forward with, would, in *this instance*, satisfy them. For, though they do think so much about money—both Herbert and Peter—still they have such a recollection of what the Langtons *were*, and in their own county too! I did not know how much till the day Herbert was here, three weeks back (on poor Fred's affairs you know), and he was talking of the Langtons, naturally, when one of them had just been so kind and serviceable! and he noticed how sad it was their losing their fine property there, and what a pity it was about this young man, Oswald, who would be the first of the family, for I don't know how many generations, not sitting in Parliament for that county! Now you see all that inclines me to think they mightn't entirely object, having seen what he is too, as they have. And then, besides, Herbert observed to me (it so happened it was just the very day before Kate's birth-day) 'that time was getting on, and that a year hence that young lady would be her own mistress;' so perhaps he may consider . . . ."

"That if he does not provide himself with a suitable nephew, he may have to put up with a very unsuitable one at the end of it," interrupted Mr. Oakly, "and it's very true; so, if you are right about the money, and old Langton *can* make a better settlement on his eldest son than on his second, why, you may be right about the rest also. But all this time, what would *she* say to it, I wonder?"

"She couldn't but be pleased!" cried her mother.

"Why, so we thought about Markham," returned Mr. Oakly, "yet, you see, she refused him; more's the pity, to my mind! But the truth is, my dear, you are three parts in love with Langton yourself, and don't perceive that a capricious monkey like Kate may have set her foolish fancy upon something she thinks more insinuating; though *I* should say that since she wouldn't have Markham, the next best thing would be this man, on whom her money wouldn't be ill bestowed, and who would no doubt be glad of it."

"Oh indeed, I don't think that!"

"Don't think what?" asked Mr. Oakly.

"I don't think Oswald Langton is the least of a fortune-hunter!"

"Did I say he was, my dear?"

"You said he would be very glad of Kate's fortune."

"Well, what then? Do you expect him to object to it? for one thing, he couldn't take her without some of it, at least."

"That is very true," assented she.

"Putting out of the question its being a very useful thing in itself;" added Mr. Oakly. "I know *I* should be much obliged to anyone who would show me how to come honestly by some thousands, that would be remarkably convenient for me this Christmas; for *I* can't go and look after heiresses at this time of day, whatever Langton can."

CHAPTER XVII.

ABOUT ten days had elapsed since Annie Oakly's fall on Milehead Common, when one forenoon, Langton, who had just ridden over from the Moat, and found no one in the drawing-room, sought Katherine in the library, asking, as usual, "how her sister was getting on?"

"Extremely well," she replied; "I expect she will be brought down to the drawing-room in a day or two; her foot and ankle are nearly well, and she is so much improved, generally, that I am allowed to sit and talk with her as much as I please."

"That is all as it should be; and I shall be truly glad to see the little huntress again. How soon did you say?"

"Annie may be allowed to come downstairs the day after to-morrow, if nothing occurs to throw her back."

Something at once gravely stiff and embarrassed in Katherine's tone and look struck Langton, as she uttered these words, and then sat looking straight before her in perfect silence, remembering her resolutions, and thinking how she could act up to them.

"Does she mean me to understand," thought he, reddening, "that I am not to come and see anyone here again? If so, I may as well know it now as later!"

"Miss Desborough," said he, "I have concluded that, considering the kind of chance that brought me into this house, and the kind of object for which I have constantly returned to it, I was not incurring displeasure on your part for so far availing myself of the permission Mr. and Mrs. Oakly gave."

"You know," replied she, hastily, "that I could only be grateful and obliged to you for your kindness—for everything you did."

"You have no need," he said, eagerly, "I had no merit; should have had none if I had done a hundred times more, for either brother or sister of yours; the difficulty would have been not to do it! Where I *had* merit—though you will scarce understand how much—was, that I could have gone, a month back, and seen you at Abchurch; could have been taken to the Selwyns before that; could have met you at the Seckford station when you were coming home from Barnham with the Daltons; yet did none of those things, lest you should say I forced my unwelcome presence on you! Well, I'm not going to force it on you now; you tell me that your sister is all but recovered; farther visits of inquiry would be superfluous, and I shall leave off troubling anyone with more."

As he spoke he rose; Katherine mechanically did the same, saying breathlessly, as he turned from her:

"I can't bear being thought ungrateful!"

"Can you not?" asked he, stopping to look at her with an expression of mingled severity and sadness; "I would not willingly do what you 'cannot bear;' but when hatred is given as the reward of love . . . ."

"I don't hate you, Mr. Langton!" cried she, vehemently.

"Then—then," returned he, drawing eagerly nearer, "but for my stupid misunderstanding, I might, without being deemed encroaching, have come here again to-morrow—perhaps yet again!"

Katherine stood panting, as if each breath she drew were exhausting her whole strength; but said at length, with great difficulty:

"I believe I ought to tell you, Mr. Langton, that I feel I ought to let mamma know, this very day, of what passed last June."

"And would she, on knowing that, think my visits better put an end to?"

"I can't of course be absolutely certain; but, though she likes you exceedingly, I should suppose she would see that it would be best so. If she and Mr. Oakly still wished you to come here, I at least should have done—should have spoken . . . ."

"Precisely as a woman ought by a man she can't endure," interrupted he; "you need not

have disclaimed hatred so emphatically, for what signify names?"

At that moment the door opened, and Mrs. Oakly appeared, her hands full of bills and account books.

"I thought I was sure to find you here," said she, calmly; while Katherine turned away (ostensibly to pick up a ball of wool that rolled to some little distance), and Langton, forcing himself with difficulty out of the angry warmth of a passionate discussion into decorous courtesy, greeted her with his usual air of respectful friendliness.

Mrs. Oakly seated herself in the chair Langton placed for her by the table, and Katherine was leaving the room; when her mother desired her to stay and seek, in the third drawer, on the right hand side of the India Cabinet, for Hanson's bill of last Christmas; "if it was not there, it was in the fifth, or perhaps in the lowest of all. I want it directly, my dear, so I wish you would look for it now, while I rest a minute, and hear what Mr. Langton has to say."

What Mr. Langton "had to say," proved to be a very politely worded but distinct announcement of his intention to quit the Moat next day, and consequently to take leave, then and there, of Wyngate and the Wyngate family.

Katherine listened to what was passing, while her trembling fingers searched in vain for the bill in one drawer after another, and she heard her

mother apologize, on the score of her own "depression when there was the least illness in the house," for Langton's not having been asked to dine and sleep at Wyngate before now. "Could he not manage to do so next day, taking them in his way after leaving the Moat?"

"No, he regretted that it was impossible."

"But by-and-bye would he not come and spend a few days—a week—bringing his horses (there was room for them all, she knew). Mr. Oakly quite depended on it; had only not given the invitation in form, because he thought Mr. Langton was as it were settled in that part of the country for some time to come."

"So far from it," replied her guest, "that I am anxious, for many reasons, to be back at Shadworth to-morrow. Pray thank Mr. Oakly for his kindness, but I am unable to avail myself of his and your hospitality."

"Not now," said the lady, "but sometime this winter, surely?"

"I shall spend the winter abroad," answered Langton, whose patience was failing him in this tantalizing dialogue, while Mrs. Oakly sat aghast at the information she received.

"Good Heavens, Kate," cried she, "had you an idea Mr. Langton was going abroad? Do come here and tell me!"

"Pray don't trouble Miss Desborough!" cried Langton, almost sharply.

But Kate obeyed, and, leaving the search after

the bill, stood before her mother stock still as an image.

"Isn't this a dreadful resolution of Mr. Langton's, my dear?"

"If it suits him," replied her daughter, with forced steadiness, "he is right to carry it through."

"I knew you would find no ally in your daughter, Mrs. Oakly!" cried Langton, in a still more irritated tone.

"How do you mean?" asked she, looking with surprise from one to another. "You don't think that Kate would be displeased at your coming here? Do tell Mr. Langton, my dear, that it is not so!"

"I can't, mamma!" ejaculated Kate, bursting into tears; whereupon her mother, suddenly possessed by a vague terror, she knew not of what, rose from her seat, and exclaimed, in great agitation, as a whole mass of stories about disguises, impostors, robbers, etc., flitted through her mind—

"Is it possible there can be any mistake? No —this *is* Cecilia's brother! Kate, you don't know anything against him?"

"Yes, Mrs. Oakly," said Langton, whose passion had by this time boiled up beyond his power of control, "there *is* something sorely against me in your daughter's eyes! for I love her, and have twice told her so!"

"You don't mean that she . . . . Kate, you have not refused Mr. Langton?"

"Yes—I ought to have said so before; it was

at the Moat, in June." And having uttered these words with effort, she rushed out of the room, while those she left behind stood for a moment gazing after her in silence.

"You see," began Langton, who first regained a certain amount of composure, "you see why it is absolutely impossible I should ever return hither, kind as you, your husband, and your younger daughter have been to me."

He would have taken his departure at once, but could not, without rudeness—unkindness, indeed—have broken away that instant from Mrs. Oakly, whose unrestrained expressions of sympathy with him, of astonishment at her daughter, gave him proof—had he needed any—that it was no fear of her *mother's* disapproval of his suit, that had impelled her to make a secret of his declaration five months back.

"I can't understand her, Mr. Langton—can't think what possesses her!" repeated she, over and over again; "for, do you know," she continued, with a lowered voice and agitated look, "she has been so variable in spirits of late—yesterday I saw her in tears—she wouldn't tell why or wherefore—that I began—it seems an odd thing to say—conjecturing whether her refusal this summer of a most excellent person, a most valued friend of ours, might chance to have to do with some preference for one who—she might think—would not, in some points, be so acceptable to her family! and that feeling it was that made me so wretched at the notion of your going!"

Langton made little answer beyond occasional expressions of his sense of the kindness shown him, and, after having been all but embraced by Mrs. Oakly, he escaped from the library to the stable yard, where the somewhat discontented grey was brought out from his comfortable stall, to be saddled afresh for a much earlier return to the Moat than either he or his master had calculated on. Katherine, meanwhile, had scarcely shut herself up in her own apartment, when she was disturbed by a knock at her door, and Margaret's voice telling her "she was wanted in Miss Oakly's room."

"I'll come presently," replied she, trying to check the flood of tears to which she had given way; but they were still streaming, when a second message was brought her to the effect that "Miss Annie wanted her very particularly, and would be obliged if she would come the moment she could."

With this summons she complied; and having barely dried her eyes, she hastened to Annie, who had wished to send her in quest of some book "that she and she only could find;" but who, alarmed at the sight of her, now implored her to sit down and "tell her at once what made her so wretched?"

Katherine sat down, but said not one word; till Annie, after waiting in vain for her to speak, asked significantly if Oswald Langton were in the house?

"He was, two minutes ago," she replied; whether he is now . . . ." But some sounds in the court below attracted her attention; she

started up without finishing her sentence, and running to the window, saw Langton just disappearing under the archway.

"He's gone, and gone for ever!" exclaimed she in passionate sorrow, and yielding herself up to it without further struggle, she hid her head in her hands, and again wept long and bitterly.

"Kate, what have you been doing to him and to yourself?" asked Annie.

"I have refused him twice."

"And made yourself as unhappy as him, I think! What *is* the reason, Kate? for I feel certain mamma would make no objection! Now tell me why! for you won't persuade me *now* that you don't like him!"

"Annie," said Kate, slowly, and after a long pause, "we sometimes have impressions, which we feel may be given us for our good, and that we ought to follow, even when they go against our likings. Such an impression I have, forbidding me to marry Oswald Langton."

"How very strange! but it must be founded on something; you are not so silly as to take up a fancy only to tease yourself with? What is it you imagine about Oswald Langton?"

"Promise me not to tell even mamma! don't speak of it to your father, either!"

Annie gave her hand in token of consent.

"My impression is—but indeed, Annie, I cannot tell you the grounds for it—my impression is, that he is not well principled, that he has not the views

of right and wrong I should like the man I married to have."

"Good Heavens, Kate, that is the last thing I should ever have dreamt of! Do you mean," added the little girl, with a very perturbed and anxious countenance, "do you mean that you ever heard him speak as if—as if he didn't believe in religion?"

"No, never; nor have I any reason to suppose *that* of him."

"Then, what *have* you heard about him? for I am sure you never *saw* anything about him but what is good and agreeable."

"I told you, Annie," replied her sister, mournfully, "that I could give you no account of my impression, farther than that it is so strong that if I acted against it I should be more wretched than I am."

"Dear Kate, you will wear yourself out with such self-tormenting! And what did you mean by refusing him *twice?*"

Katherine told her briefly of what had occurred at the Spencer Langtons', on hearing which, Annie said, rather reproachfully:

"You would have been less unhappy if you had told mamma and me; but I am very, very sorry you have that shocking idea, I don't half understand; but I *do* understand now the reason why you wouldn't have Lewis Markham; and that of many other things besides. Couldn't you speak to mamma about that notion of yours?"

"No, no, Annie," replied she, almost angrily; "and I count on you for keeping silent on the subject."

"Oh, so I will. I was only thinking if you would yourself speak—but here is mamma. Poor dear Kate, how you do tremble!"

She did, indeed, seem ready to sink into the earth with confusion and sorrow, when Mrs. Oakly, entering, took a seat opposite her two daughters.

"Kate," she began, "Mr. Oakly wishes me to ask you—though it seems to me quite impossible—whether you ever heard in Paris, or any way, that Oswald Langton was a gambler?"

She dropt her voice almost to a whisper, as she uttered the last word, and then paused for a reply, which was distinctly given.

"No, mamma, I never heard so; have no such notion."

"Ah, he thought it most improbable! but still, there was something else Mr. Oakly begged me to inquire; it was—it seems to me almost foolish to ask such a thing, but he wished the question to be put—whether you had any reason to fancy he was ill-thought of among the other gentlemen you used to meet at the Carews', and Hazlewoods', and Shelburnes'."

"No," said Katherine, "I never had reason to fancy it."

"Then I may say so to Mr. Oakly?"

"Yes, mamma."

To a more penetrating observer than Mrs. Oakly, something set and rigid in Katherine's manner and look, while giving these answers, would have provoked farther questions; but her mother, satisfied with the substance of her replies, inquired no farther; and Annie, who *was* struck by her sister's demeanour, felt too much bewildered by the strangeness of the whole business to dare express the puzzled sensation produced on her.

"May I go away now, mamma?" asked Katherine, submissively."

"Yes, my dear," said her mother, in a listless tone, "there's no more to be said, I suppose, on this unsatisfactory subject. I only hope and conclude you have known your own mind on this, as on other occasions."

"I hope so, mamma," replied Katherine, steadily, and left the apartment."

"She looks perfectly miserable," said Mrs. Oakly, as to herself, when her eldest daughter had disappeared.

"And she *is* miserable, I'm sure," cried Annie.

"Ah, you think so too, child, do you?"

"Oh yes, mamma, if you had seen her, when Mr. Langton rode away, how she cried and sobbed, as if her heart would break, you would have thought she loved nobody on earth so much!"

"She is a most extraordinary girl, I will say; and there is no fathoming her motives."

"Mamma," said Annie, very gravely, "*you* would have had no objection, would you, if Kate

had liked—had chosen—to marry Mr. Langton?"

"I! my dear! not the least in the world! I can't of course tell what her uncles might think, and I shouldn't like her to displease them; but I know they think well of him; and—she will be of age in less than a year."

"Before that time comes, she will be out of her senses, mamma, if she goes on this way."

"My dear Annie, you quite frighten me! but what *is* one to do? One can't advise her against what she says she wishes on such a point. What can be the meaning of it all?"

Whether Annie would have long withstood the temptation to tell her mother of that "impression" of Kate's, which appeared to her in the light of a sort of madness, cannot be known; for at the very moment when she was most inclined to forget her promise, Katherine herself entered, saying imploringly to Mrs. Oakly:

"Oh, dear mamma, will you kindly go down to see Mrs. Spencer Langton, who is just come (she has got the Lancefields' carriage, I suppose!); you see, I *can't* show myself! Pray, dear mamma, make my excuses to her, the best way you can, for I'm not fit to see her."

"Mrs. Spencer Langton, of all people on earth too!" cried Mrs Oakly, despairingly. "What *shall* I say to her, Kate?"

"Oh, mamma, anything you please; only don't let her come up to me, for I should go wild!" and

she pressed both her hands to her temples as she spoke, while her mother, looking anxiously at her, resigned herself, unwillingly indeed, but with helpless submission, to the truly unpleasant doom of entertaining Mrs. Spencer Langton under present circumstances.

She left the room accordingly; and Katherine soon followed, retreating to her own chamber with the words, "I'm company for nobody but myself just now, Annie."

Thus left alone to her reflections, Annie closed her eyes and lay still for some minutes; after which she rang the little bell on the table near her, to summon Margaret from the adjoining work-room, and on the maid's appearing, asked for writing materials. She waited till the servant had left her again, and then, half raising herself on her sofa, forthwith commenced, for the first time in her life, a letter to Cecilia.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On the evening of that same day, the two brothers, Oswald and Spencer Langton, sat together by the fire in the little dining-room at the Moat; but, though whatever confidential talk had passed between them was already at an end, they still appeared in no hurry to follow the lady of the house into the sitting-room. The elder brother, buried in thoughts of no enlivening nature, and leaning back in his chair, with folded arms and fixed look, seemed totally unconscious of the storm, which caused the somewhat insecure window-frames to rattle so loudly that the younger turned his head more than once to see if the angry blast did no worse than only shake the sash, and drive the rain-drops noisily upon the panes.

"It must be confessed," he observed, as the howl of the tempest increased, and the sound of a yet shriller blast struck his ears, "it must be confessed that the Moat in winter is rather different to the Moat in summer."

"It *is* different!" replied Oswald; but without looking up, or noticing what had led Spencer to make the remark.

"I hope, since you *will* go, Oswald, that it may be better weather for your journey to Shadworth to-morrow."

"I must go, fair or foul; and go a good deal farther, too, than Shadworth, though of course I must spend a day or so there."

"Ah, that's what I wanted to speak a word about," said Spencer, in rather a hesitating manner. "Couldn't you make up your mind to staying three or four days at my father's before your final start? wouldn't that be possible?"

"Possible! yes—but very unnecessary, I should say. What's the use of lengthening out farewells, and lingering at home to no purpose, when no duty or compulsion obliges one? I shall most likely start on Thursday."

Another long silence ensued, which was again broken by Spencer, who said, with much of the manner of one who has wound himself up to make a request likely to be unwelcome:

"I wish, Oswald, you would stay at my father's till over Sunday, unless it would be exceedingly unpleasant to you."

"It *would* be unpleasant for me to stay one hour beyond what decency and kindness require," replied he, moodily; "not but that I would do as you wish for any adequate reason," added he, with some attempt to shake off the gloom that overspread his countenance. "Is there any business I can do for you, Spencer, before leaving home?"

"No, I can't say there is any; but—I suppose

I must even tell you my reasons, though I would rather have kept them to myself. I conclude you know that Alicia was at Wyngate to-day?"

"I guessed she had been—what then?"

"Why (I *must* touch the string again, Oswald), she did not see Kate, but she saw Kate's mother, who, I believe, didn't intend enlightening her as to what had just passed; but being unskilful at parrying questions about the young lady's non-appearance, and being, moreover, off her balance herself, and excessively agitated, before five minutes were over, Mrs. Oakly came out with the whole, bewailing her daughter's blindness, and expressing her inability to understand the motive of her conduct, since she had no sooner acted in a manner one would think decisive, than she began to give every token of repentance, save that of declaring it in words."

"Some young ladies have an especial pleasure in weeping over scenes in fictions; a real-life scene answers the purpose for *her*, I suppose," observed Oswald, ironically. "But what does all this tend to? for hitherto it is only what Mrs Oakly (who is a good soul, but a great fool) said the sense of to me this morning."

"It has tended to strengthen Alicia—who, whatever she *was*, *is* a very warm friend of yours—in a notion (which I find has been haunting her ever since last June) that you have not been refused in consequence of dislike—or even indifference—but of a prejudice which she fancies

herself guilty of instilling into Kate Desborough, six months ago."

"Nonsense!" cried his brother, impatiently. "I can imagine poor Alicia's abusing me pretty smartly then; but Kate Desborough is not the girl to be prejudiced against her own feeling by another woman's talk; so why I should be kept longer on tenter hooks I don't see; and I can't stand it."

"If you can't, it's no use saying more; only Alicia was crying about it before dinner, and imploring me to help her to repair the mischief she's afraid of having done."

"And how does she expect such mischief to be repaired, supposing this conjecture of hers to have any foundation?"

"She wants to have Cecilia here for a day or two, for she believes that between them they cannot but get to the bottom of what seems so unaccountable; and then she thinks too (and so do I), that whatever turns out, it is less unsatisfactory to know the truth, than to be beset by the thought that there may have been a mistake through it all."

"I *do* know the truth," said Oswald, gloomily, and thereupon sank into an almost sullen silence, from which, however, he presently roused himself to say, in a more good-humoured tone—"Look you, Spencer, Alicia is very kind-hearted, and is, I fully believe—as you said just now—a warm friend of mine; but, for all that, I don't see what is to be gained by her and Cecilia, and, I suppose, Mrs. Oakly, sitting in a sort of sentimental committee

upon my affairs (which I look on as irrevocably settled), except prolonging my torture, perhaps unnecessarily worrying some one else. What your wife proposes is a thing women enjoy peculiarly—(mind, I believe they are honestly persuaded that there lies great efficacy in the proceeding.) But just tell her that I am most sensible to her zeal and friendliness, and that I forgive her heartily for whatever she may have said not exactly in my praise, being able to do so the more easily from my conviction that nothing of the sort can have influenced the judgment or liking of one who is singularly indisposed to mould her feelings, or frame her opinions, upon the lead given her by others."

"I will tell her so, if you insist on it; but it will be a great disappointment to her," said Spencer.

"It is not possible," resumed his brother, "that she should know enough about me, good or bad, to be able (without inventing, which she is incapable of) to harm me in the estimation of any rational creature."

"I daresay not," replied Spencer, "but then girls are not rational creatures; and what it is that Alicia reproaches herself so much about, I don't know. I saw she had no mind to tell me, so I was not disposed to investigate the precise description of nonsense it probably was; but its being nonsense—and great nonsense—is no token, Oswald, that it may not have had its effect; for even the cleverest and most sensible girls are often idiotical

on some points; and I *do* suppose that when Kate Desborough has once taken up an idea, it may be hard to get rid of it."

"She was idiotical in refusing Lewis Markham," observed Oswald. "It is the only foolish thing I am aware of her having ever done."

"I privately think she did another this morning," said Spencer. "But will you not even carry a letter, or a message, from Alicia to Cecilia, it remaining still open for you either to start for the Continent on Thursday, or stay on a few days, according as you and she settle it between yourselves at Shadworth?"

"I'll think about it, Spencer, but I won't promise," said his brother, rising. "I have had enough and too much of 'staying on,' and have made a fool of myself along of it. But there has Alicia been left all this time by herself in the drawing-room! Do go to her, and I'll follow presently. You can tell her I'll think about it."

Spencer accordingly joined his wife in the next room, and had ample time to repeat to her the substance of what had passed between his brother and him, while the former continued pacing up and down the small apartment which formed his quarter-deck.

"If he would stay on those few days!" exclaimed Alicia, on hearing her husband's report, "and if we could get Cecilia here, I do believe we should have the wedding after all, and I should get this horrid weight off my mind, which will go on

suffocating me for ever and ever, if I can't get things set right!"

"Alicia, what *did* you say about Oswald to Kate Desborough?" asked her husband, gravely.

But she looked frightened, said "she knew he would be angry," and that "she was sure now she must have been mistaken, though, after all," added she, by way of excusing herself, "I only repeated something I once heard from you."

"Heard from me, Alicia! You never heard harm of Oswald from me."

"Ah, well, I daresay you have forgotten; but, Spencer dear," continued she quickly, in order to cut short farther questionings, "don't you think I might run in and beg and pray Oswald, out of kindness to me—for my sake—to have this little bit of patience?"

"No, Alicia, no; if he won't take patience for his own sake, it's idle expecting he should for yours. And then you know I engaged, as a condition of his coming here, that you should never say a word, in joke or earnest, about Kate Desborough, and I'm sure this is no time for breaking the observance."

"No, that's true; I daresay you are right; but it's so provoking to think of his flying off, when I feel so convinced—when Mrs. Oakly herself told me Kate nearly went into hysterics when she saw him ride off!"

"If that's true, my dear, she must be fit for Bedlam," observed Spencer.

"Oh, it *is* true, and a great deal more besides; only, you see, as she won't admit me, and one can't manage those things well in writing, it's only by having Cecilia here, that it's possible to get to the bottom of the whole story."

"Are you sure, even then?"

"Not quite—not absolutely—but next thing to it; and I do hope . . . but here comes Oswald, and I won't say a word more."

Her brother-in-law entered as she finished her speech, and nothing more was talked of, for the short remainder of the evening, but his intended journey, and the probabilities for and against there being a larger subscription to the Kingsford hounds that year than the preceding one.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAD Mrs. Spencer Langton plainly said, either to her husband by word of mouth, or to Cecilia in writing, "I told Kate Desborough in the summer, that I believed Oswald to be a dissolute and unprincipled man; I no longer believe it, and as I cannot see her to tell her so myself, I shall know no peace till it is done for me," the hopes that she built upon delays and interviews might not have been treated as absolutely visionary. But a confession, in such a plain, straightforward shape, requires some courage; and Alicia (who, though extremely rash, had no courage at all) did not possess either the strength of judgment or the delicacy of feeling, which might have enabled her to perceive that, without perfect explicitness, her words would go for nothing. The consequence was, that the letter which Oswald consented to carry with him to Shadworth (rather out of courtesy than from any other motive), dwelt chiefly upon "*her* impressions," "*her* convictions," "*her* self-reproach for having 'influenced' Miss Desborough," interlarded with such a silly display of high-flown sentiment, as rendered it difficult to

fancy that the person who was arguing a point so vaguely and so foolishly, could have anything more positive at bottom wherewith to substantiate her arguments.

"There is nothing in all this," said Oswald, "to prove any single fact, except that poor Alicia is conceited enough to imagine that a 'misrepresentation of hers' has set matters wrong, and that an 'explanation of hers' will set them right. I neither believe the one thing nor the other; and if you are in your sober senses, Cecy, you must agree with me; but, whether or no, my mind is made up; and I shall just beg of you to write to Alicia as kind a letter as you can, telling her, at the same time, that when it reaches her I shall be gone."

Of the impossibility of mischief's having been done through Alicia's talk, Cecilia was not quite so satisfied as her brother; and she had, moreover, in the bottom of her soul, a feeling which made her desirous of accepting the invitation given her by Alicia, if it were only to assure herself, beyond all power of after doubt, that the past was indeed irrevocable. She was sensible, however, that Oswald's view was the apparently rational one; and was fully aware also that, even in the event of Alicia's having more to *say* than she chose to write, the information to be obtained from her might be irritating or afflicting only, without affording the slightest handle for the "justification" of one whom nobody accused. It was difficult, with such a slender stock of hope, to

argue with a man who was *hopeless*, and who was, besides, too much disposed to despise himself for past delays and past delusions, to listen with patience to plans "which," he said, "involved—as before—a renewal of tantalization and mortification, with less excuse than on the previous occasion." Cecilia soon ceased, therefore, to contest a point which—as she admitted to herself—was, most probably, of no importance; and when, after luncheon, Oswald had gone out riding with his father, she prepared, with what heart she might, to compose, in compliance with his request, the kindest answer she could to Alicia. It was a hard task; and she had not proceeded far in it, when a letter, with the Wyngate post-mark, was laid before her. Under the circumstances, the receipt of any letter from thence was a surprise; and it was a still greater one to perceive that it was directed neither by Mrs. Oakly nor by Kate, but in an unformed hand, which so strongly reminded her of Annie Oakly's manuscript book of "Poetical Extracts," that she was convinced it must be from her; and hastily opening it, read the following lines:—

"MY DEAR, DARLING CECY,

"I hope you will not blame me for what I am doing—that is, writing to you without anyone's knowing of it; but, indeed, I can't think it is wrong, for we are all so unhappy. Mamma is downstairs with Mrs. Spencer Langton,

and poor Kate has gone away to her own room, because she can't bear being with me, even; so I hope I shall be left alone time enough to tell how much I want you to come and see us; or, if you don't like to offer yourself *here*, do come to Mrs. Tynedale's, for then you could see Kate, and speak to her—and then I am sure you would set all right. I believe Kate lets me see more of her mind than she shews to mamma; but, though I am quite certain of what would *really* make her happy, still I am only a little girl, and she will not tell me everything, as she does to you; and so I am not able to prove to her, as you could, that she can't be right in going against her own feelings and punishing herself (and some one else besides), as she has been doing for ever so long. I know *he* is very unhappy; and I am sure you will come, for everybody's sake; but pray, dear Cecy, let it be soon, for Kate is *so* wretched, and neither mamma nor I can think what to do with her.

"Ever yours affectionately,

"ANNIE OAKLY.

"P.S.—I am better now; but they will not let me leave the sofa yet; still, I don't mind that, or anything, if you will only come. I am afraid this will hardly be put into the post to-day; but I hope Margaret may manage it for me to-morrow."

Cecilia tore up the letter she had begun to her sister-in-law at once. The stamp of truth was impressed upon Annie's effusion; which,

notwithstanding the childishness and vehemence of its phraseology, confirmed what was shadowed forth in Alicia's romantic bursts of feeling, concerning Katherine Desborough's wavering and repentant state. It was impossible to help smiling over the solemnity of poor little Annie's assertion that "neither she nor mamma could think what to do with Kate," but the picture it presented was not the less life-like; and it determined Cecilia on writing instantly to Mrs. Tynedale, to do what she was always at liberty to do, namely, announce herself as being likely to arrive on the morrow. *That* was a business easily done. It took more time to indite an epistle to the Moat, in which, thanking Alicia warmly for her invitation, she explained (without however thinking it necessary to mention Annie's communication) that the object of a confidential talk with Katherine was more likely to be attainable for her, by staying in a house within a few minutes' walk of Wyngate Park gate, than in one nine miles off. She had just finished as her father and brother came in, when following the latter into his room, which was in that uncomfortably disordered state denoting that the occupant had arrived yesterday, and will start again to-morrow, she put Annie Oakly's letter into his hands.

"I don't ask you your opinion of this," said she, "but I show it you, in order that you may know why I am resolved upon leaving home to-morrow, on a short visit to Mrs. Tynedale, and why I am

going to beg of you to remain here with my father till I come back."

She did not look at him while he was reading (she suspected, by the time he took, that he must have perused it more than once), nor did she belie what she had just said, by putting a single question, or making any remark implying more than a wish to be enabled, as for her own pleasure and satisfaction, to pay another visit to her godmother. She gathered, however, by the difficulty with which he kept up the tone of carelessness, as he replied "that it would be hard if he refused her the first favour she had asked of him these three years," that a new hope had glided into his soul, though he was struggling to conceal it under an appearance of indifference.

CHAPTER XX.

"I AM afraid, my dear," said Mr. Oakly, after listening to a long outpouring of all his wife's disappointments and perplexities, "I am afraid I can't help you to any better understanding of matters. I only know that the girl was a very sensible girl when she set off for Paris, and seemed, rather to my surprise, to have come back as sensible as she went. What they did to her at the Moat I can't tell, for she has never been like herself since; but it's too much to suppose her quite so perverse as to refuse a man twice over, when she is desperately in love with him all the while! I'm more inclined to fear, now, that that letter I forwarded to the Moat from 'dear Isabella' may have contained a message from some foreign fop or other, who has made her too fine to think of a plain Englishman, be he rich or poor. I hope I'm wrong; but if such an exquisite *should* make his appearance among us next November, I take it that Messrs. Herbert and Peter Desborough will be more sorry than they are already, that they once insisted on keeping their niece, at all risks, out of the way of Lewis Markham."

Mr. Oakly quitted the room, after delivering himself of this comforting discourse, which rendered his wife absolutely speechless with horror. Indeed, it was not till after a long conversation with Annie, that she recovered herself sufficiently to be restored to her prior belief in a state of things which was melancholy enough, but not quite so alarming to her fancy as the image of the "foreign fop," arriving at Wyngate next autumn, to take possession of her daughter, and her daughter's fortune.

Poor Annie, now transferred from a sofa in her bed-room, to a sofa in the drawing-room, had her own private distresses; for besides her sympathy with her mother, her sister, and Oswald Langton, and besides her inward disturbance of mind at having actually written a letter underhand—even to Cecilia—she had now been made aware of Mr. Newman's opinion, that she ought not to mount a horse for a couple of months, and then only "in a quiet way," and for very short rides. She had borne the intelligence with as much fortitude as was to be expected; but her spirits were not raised by the monotony of her mother's complaints, though she nevertheless felt it as some consolation to be perpetually talked to—nay, even in a manner consulted—about her elder sister's affairs. Their discussions were never long checked by the presence of Katherine, who, now first avowing to her own mind the nature and extent of the feeling which

devoured her, wandered about the house and grounds like a ghost, asking herself if that were indeed a direct and absolute duty, to which she had sacrificed her own inclination, and apparently that of her mother? She had thought it so six months back; and if all had indeed been as she then believed, she acknowledged that she should think so still. But whether it were that, in the unhappiness her sacrifice involved, she was tempted to encourage doubts she had, till now, shut the door upon—or whether, on the other hand, a severe judgment, hastily adopted and obstinately adhered to, was beginning to give way before the light of reason—it is certain that her mind was no longer at unity with itself. Was it, after all, such an absolute necessity that the old traveller's confident assertions should be correct? Were they not opposed by those of his friend, who had equal means of judging, and whose belief respecting Mr. de Neyrac, was (as she was now better aware than when she sat on the stone bench in the Park of St. Cloud) the belief commonly received in the world? She had formerly put this question aside as childish—had told herself that it was not well to allow her mind to be disturbed from its cool convictions by a delusion only built upon what she had hitherto ridiculed as a delusion in others. Yet, was it so ridiculous? Had she as much right as she had once supposed, to scorn the ignorant credulity of the Hazlewoods and others, who, with one

accord, designated Neyrac as the favoured lover of Lady Carew? And again, when she reminded herself that it was not *solely* upon the traveller's assertions that she had grounded the belief she abhorred, but that recollections of her own had appeared to confirm and certify them, the reply was ready, "that coincidences are not proofs, and that those which imagination adopted as such might be capable of a very different interpretation." That Lady Carew had spent in loneliness the hours of the simultaneous absence of Sir Edward at the "Rocher," and of herself at Mrs. Charlemont's, Katherine certainly did not now believe. It was an equally incontestable fact, that Oswald Langton had obtained her the invitation which took her that evening to the "Champs Elysées;" but did it follow that he had done so for any other reason than that he had avowed, namely, of amusing himself by playing upon Mrs. Charlemont's prejudices? She herself had never doubted it, till the overhearing of that conversation at St. Cloud had certified her of so much evil, that it had led her to mistrust the man whom all beside trusted, and to think him capable of feigning the love she now deemed so sincere! If the sentence she had inwardly passed on Oswald Langton was unjust, then she had wantonly deprived herself—and him no less—of a happiness neither could know elsewhere. "And yet," as she over and over again repeated, "who can assure me that I

have been unjust? that I am not deceiving myself now?" But having once given her thoughts permission to take Langton's defence, as it were, the inward argument was resumed directly. One minute she was reminding herself that Mr. de Neyrac was every bit as tall as Oswald, and that this circumstance, combined with his disposition to imitate the style of dress of Englishmen, increased the likelihood of the one's being taken (especially at night) for the other; while the next minute her feverish perplexity was renewed by the recollection of Lady Carew's anger—jealous anger, as it seemed—against herself. But, "the last links were broken;" why look back upon the past? She had refused Langton twice, because she believed in his unworthiness; why not be consistent and go on believing that—whatever came—she had done well in rejecting him?

Wiser people than Katherine Desborough are inconsistent however; and if she was miserable when tormented by the remorseful feeling of having done Oswald injustice, she was more miserable still, whenever she—by main force, in a manner—had succeeded for a while in viewing him in the old light of having been the bane and the destruction of Isabella Carew.

"I wish I could see Cecilia!" exclaimed Mrs. Oakly to Annie, on the morning of the fourth day after the dismal one on which Oswald Langton had received his second refusal. "I wish I could speak to Cecilia! and yet there would be a great awkward-

ness, as it would be all about her own brother. Still, I don't think she would mind, not being the least touchy, and I telling her—as of course I should—how highly I think of him! But it's not what one could ask her here for, or write to her. So it's no use thinking whether one would like to talk to her or no."

Annie felt terribly guilty during this speech; and the more so, as she was beginning to dread lest her attempt at acting on her own account should have met with nothing but contemptuous indifference on Cecilia's part and Oswald's. Mrs. Oakly, therefore, did not receive the comfort of a rejoinder, and total silence prevailed for some minutes, till Annie, suddenly starting up on her sofa, and coloring highly, exclaimed, as she looked towards the window:

"Mamma, mamma! there *is* Cecilia coming through the garden!"

"You don't say so, Annie!" cried her mother, now only sensible to the embarrassment of any communication with the person she had just wished for. "I suppose," continued she, faintly, "that I must see her!"

"Oh, yes, mamma, you really must," said Annie, notwithstanding that she was herself waxing sorely frightened lest her unauthorised summons to Miss Langton should be revealed, unseasonably, in the course of the impending visit. She had, however, no ground for alarm; as Cecilia took care to give Mrs. Oakly no token of having received

a hint to do that which, being at Mrs. Tynedale's, it was but natural she should do.

Annie's accident and her convalescence were of course the first topics of conversation; but the moment Cecilia asked "if she was likely to see Kate presently where they were, or if she should have to go in quest of her in her old haunt, the library?" Mrs. Oakly's feelings burst their flood gates, and she ejaculated:

"Oh, my dear Cecilia, do go to her! I daresay she will hesitate about seeing you—I have no doubt it is from shyness of you that she has not come in here already. But I implore of you to speak to her about—about what has been making us all so miserable; and for fear of there being any delicacy—any scruple on your part, I tell you openly that if there is a man in the world I would gladly entrust dear Kate to, not even excepting Lewis Markham, it is your brother!"

"You are very kind, dear Mrs. Oakly, but . . ."

"Oh, don't say 'but,' Cecy," cried Annie; "if you once have Kate to yourself, I am sure you will bring her to confess to what she really likes, and get her to make herself and everyone happy!"

"I will try, Annie, but I am not quite so confident of it as you seem," replied Cecilia, who, mindful of Kate's request, in the summer, for silence between themselves on the subject of Oswald, thought it not impossible that she might find her too averse to any breach of that engagement, to be able to bring out the very things she

had come so far to speak of. But when, on opening the library door, she found her she sought, a something indescribable in her look and manner impressed her with the belief that her young friend *expected* to be addressed on the once forbidden topic, and she felt thereby emboldened to say, without farther preface:

"My dear Kate, I am come to tease you."

"I suppose mamma sent you here for that," replied Katherine, mournfully, though with an attempt to smile; "but, dear Cecy, don't press me too hard with questions, I have had so many to answer in these last few days!"

"I have not forgotten," returned Miss Langton, sitting down beside her, "that I once agreed never to come with you on the subject you are afraid of; nor should I now venture on anything approaching it, I assure you, were it not that your mother, and Alicia, and even your little sister Annie, are all convinced that if you had solely followed your inclination, without reference to other impressions, you would have acted differently."

"Annie had no business to say so!" ejaculated Katherine, with involuntary impetuosity."

"It is not a crime to be mistaken," observed Cecilia. "But am I to understand, Kate," continued she, "that they *are* thoroughly mistaken on that point, and that you have refused Oswald simply through that complete indifference which disables one from returning love, and not at all through any prejudice with which you may have been inspired?"

"I thought it best to refuse," said Katherine, shortly, and without relaxing from the rigidly composed attitude in which she sat.

"If you thought so, it probably was; but" (she took Katherine's hand as she went on) "had I supposed—as I did four days back—that you had certainly *no* motive for your decision, save what concerned yourself and your own feelings, you would never—never have heard a word from me tending to investigate them. Now, however, I confess it is different with me: I have a sensation as if all were not as I lately believed! Kate, you will not tell me that your mother, and Alicia, and Annie are *all* utterly mistaken?"

Katherine pressed Cecilia's hand tightly, and then said, as she drew her own from it with a convulsive jerk:

"I can't equivocate with you, Cecy!" and unrestrained tears trickled down her cheeks as she cast her eyes sorrowfully on the ground.

"I can't bear to torment you, my dear child!" exclaimed Cecilia; "yet how do otherwise, when you in a manner admit the truth of what has been imagined, although you refuse any explanation which could render things plain and comprehensible; which could afford—if not satisfaction—peace to others and to yourself?"

"I can't give satisfaction to anyone," replied Katherine, gloomily.

"To me you could, Kate, if to no one else in the world, by only speaking the truth from your heart! that used not to be a difficulty with you,

dearest child," added Cecilia, clasping her in her arms.

"No, it used not," repeated her young friend with emotion, "but somehow it *is* now."

"You see, Kate, I cannot easily sit down with the notion that all this may involve some unworthiness imputed to my brother; and you must be sensible that such a view of things must alter the whole matter in my eyes."

"I have never accused him of any unworthiness," replied Katherine, with a sort of measured distinctness which struck so strangely on Cecilia's ear as to force from her the hurried rejoinder:

"But you have *suspected* him of what was unworthy!"

There was no answer, and Cecilia went on:

"Kate, I implore of you to tell me what it is! I know Alicia has spoken ill of him to you; I know it because she reproaches herself for it now, and has been begging me to see you, and to explain how sorry she is for having, as she expressed it, 'influenced' you against him, she has not said how or in what manner; but indeed, dear Kate, it would be unkind—unjust almost—to withhold from me the knowledge of what it is that Alicia or *anyone* has told you to give you a bad opinion of Oswald!"

"I hate to seem unkind—above all, unkind to you—Cecy! so I will try; but it is very—very—difficult. I did not take up this impression of your brother in consequence of anything I heard

at the Moat, albeit it was of a kind—of a nature—somewhat akin to what your sister-in-law told me of him, only not exactly so systematic; though, as I said before, her stories did not, in themselves, influence me."

"Her stories!—not so systematic!" repeated Cecilia. "She may well be ashamed of herself!—And is it really—actually—true that she allowed her foolish spite to carry her so far as to make to *you* these very same speeches she tormented me with in the spring? As if Oswald led a profligate life, as it were, upon principle; was given up to vice wilfully, almost intentionally!"

"I thought she most likely exaggerated; but . . ."

Katherine hesitated, and her friend continued—

"But you also thought, through some previous impression, if I understood you rightly, that he was not well-principled, not one whom you could esteem and look up to; was it so?"

Katherine bowed her head in token of assent, and Cecilia went on to ask hastily how she had received that impression—on what it was founded?

The painful embarrassment exhibited in Katherine's whole demeanour appeared to redouble as she answered, after a considerable pause, "that she was not able—was not at liberty—to repeat the precise grounds of an impression which *had*—she confessed—laid a very strong hold on her. But, dearest friend," continued she, with a sudden change of countenance, and fixing her eyes eagerly

on Cecilia as she spoke, "do *you* tell me whether, in your heart and in your conscience, you think your brother so guided by those views of right which you yourself hold sacred, as that I should do well in taking him to guide me, and be through life my earthly staff of reliance?"

"Yes," replied Cecilia, "I do believe, in my heart and in my conscience, that you would find in him as true and steady a guide as ever man was to woman."

"Then you think of him *quite differently* to what Alicia did!" exclaimed Katherine joyfully. But a shade of expression which passed over Cecilia's face disappointed her; and she said, with less of hope and more of impatience—"Tell me your opinion of him as if he were *not* your brother!"

"That is difficult, considering that he is the dearest to me of all my brothers. Still, as I have called on you, dear Kate, for perfect openness, I must not be behindhand in the same towards you, and I will try and speak impartially. Had you not so appealed to me, that I feel myself bound to confess my thoughts and belief as on my death-bed, I could, with literal truth, tell you that I know nothing against my brother in any respect. But as I perceive that what you lay so much stress on is an entire and thorough purity of life, such as *I* have lived long enough to know the rarity of, I am bound to confess that what has been my fear and my affliction for some years past, is the dread lest—looking on marriage as out of the question

for himself—Oswald may (without the deliberate purpose Alicia once attributed to him) have lacked the forbearance necessary to abstain entirely from evil. This fear, which, I ought in justice to say, has been grounded on nothing more tangible than the speculations which a growing knowledge of the world and its wickedness brings with it, has been sometimes confirmed, and sometimes allayed, by an occasional appearance of dissatisfaction with himself, which he has at times given vent to in passing words, the only intelligible import of which was regret for being borne down a stream whence he had not the strength or skill to swim to shore. Since his last return from abroad, indeed, these expressions of regret, when they have occurred, have betokened something keener than mere sorrow for misspent time; they have borne witness—as it struck me—to a deep and sincere repentance, which, in a mind like Oswald's, cannot exist without equally sincere resolutions of a change of life. I have now said all; and having thus said my worst of him I love best in the world, I may fairly tell you that I believe no man—once trusted and placed in a situation where another's happiness is bound up with his—would be more thoroughly to be relied on; and that, not solely through the ardent and devoted love he bears you, but also through the right feeling and sense of duty, which, however it may have possibly failed him in some trials, has assuredly never been found wanting as regards any direct obligation. He may have

lowered himself more than I like to think (though, in that respect, he would but resemble too many who stand well with the world); but I am persuaded that no gratification of his has ever cost another human being peace or innocence."

"If I were but sure of that!" cried Katherine.

"Kate!—you don't mean to say that you have heard—that you believe that of him?"

"I *did* hear it—and—I *did* believe it! but . ."

"But now you think you have been mistaken?"

"I have sometimes hoped so, during the last few days," replied Katherine, though in a tone so dejected, as almost to imply that at that moment her hope had deserted her.

"My dearest Kate," returned Cecilia, in a low voice, which she steadied with difficulty, "you know what it involves for me to lose or to retain the power of esteeming Oswald; and it is therefore that, independently of what your own resolves may be, I again implore you to tell me—to tell me without reserve—whatever it is that you know—or suspect rather—about him."

"I *do* know what he is to you, and it was chiefly because I knew it, that I determined to avoid what must result in your searching into motives and feelings which, with mamma, I dare not enter into, because—as you are very well aware—she is not self-possessed enough to keep a secret. I can rely on *you*; and therefore I may let you know so much, at least, as to make you understand what I have believed—but what it would be my greatest

happiness to disbelieve, and to look back on only as one looks back, in waking thankfulness, upon a hideous dream. I ought to tell you that I was originally displeased—revolted almost—by a sort of hard indifference—occasionally even by a reckless levity—in your brother's conversation in Paris; quite the reverse of what I expected in one so near you; and—I must add—widely different from what I have seen in him since. But towards the end of my stay abroad, and after I had begun to feel—to think—there might be, under that manner, what was more worthy of a brother of yours, I accidentally learnt something—something—which (as I then thought) *proved* to me that a young and, hitherto, innocent woman, moving in the same society as myself, had been led into evil paths—been utterly corrupted by him!"

"A hitherto innocent woman! corrupted by him! my dear Kate," interrupted Cecilia—"such a thing is simply impossible! If you had known Oswald as I do, you would have felt that at once!"

"And so I should have felt, had it not been that . . . ."

"That you thought such a report could not be current without there being foundation for it? Yet you surely did not live two months in Paris without becoming aware how easily false reports arise in that sort of mixed society, where idle chattering foreigners get together with English as idle as themselves! I know there was no friendly

feeling between Oswald and Lady Carew, and if it was from her you heard this report . . ."

"I did not hear it from Lady Carew; nor was it by report, properly speaking, that I heard it—not by common report at least—for the world's talk has never connected your brother's name with—with—that most unhappy person, whose misconduct has been, *is*, I should say, only suspected by people in general, owing to the more public attentions of another admirer."

"Another admirer! then, in that case, my dear child," said Cecilia, whose countenance had by this time entirely lost the troubled expression it had worn while her suspense lasted, "in that case, *I* at least can disturb myself no longer about this dreadful report! I am only more and more astonished," continued she, with a smile, "at its having had such a lasting effect on you, as that you should have gone on thus long believing what made you so miserable!"

"It *did* make me miserable!" exclaimed Katherine, vehemently; "and I suppose that if I had had the courage to tell you about it in the summer, I should have seen, as I do now, that what you feel as impossible, must *be* impossible; only to look at you smiling, and seeming so quietly convinced 'that it couldn't be,' has taken a load off my heart, and makes me feel that, in spite of perplexing circumstances, and in spite of the apparent impartiality of the person whose opinions I adopted—And yet, Cecilia," continued she, hastily, while a

look of horror overspread her countenance, "there was one thing I could not be mistaken about! the moment it became perceptible that he—that your brother—was occupied with me, *she* was jealous of it! that is what I cannot forget, that is the one thing I can never explain away!"

"*I* can explain it very easily," said Cecilia, calmly: "this nameless lady, with *another admirer*, is probably very vain, and such persons, even when they have not gone the lengths she has, are often jealous, not only of the attentions of those they love, but of those they are not the least disposed to love."

"You think so, you really think so? Did you ever know of such a thing? Know it of your own knowledge?" persisted Katherine.

"Yes! for I was in my cousin Henry Beaumont's house, when his handsome wife, who, as you know, considers herself a very virtuous woman, was so put out, at the discovery that Sir George Elwyn's visits and attentions were for the sake of her tall niece, Emily Wildman, that her mortification was visible to every beholder, and—I believe—damaged her reputation considerably. Yet all the while she had no more concern in that very plain little man Sir George, than in Captain Vincent, or Mr. Sykes, or any of her other danglers; it only hurt her greedy vanity to perceive that any man who had the privilege of being acquainted with *her*, should presume to notice any other woman."

"How much more close a resemblance than she

supposes!" thought Katherine, as she, at one and the same time, listened to Cecilia, and rapidly retraced in her mind the events of her stay in Paris. Isabella Carew, also, could brook no rival near her throne! In spite of her flattering manner, her vanity and her love of power had, doubtless, both been mortified by the discovery that anyone, besides Robert Hazlewood, had failed to acknowledge her absolute supremacy! Her disputes with her husband, too—and her fear of losing the convenient company of the "young friend," whose presence was essential to the prolonging of her stay in the city where Neyrac resided—her irritation against Langton, whose advice (as she knew) tended to deprive her of that support—all these things might well, as Katherine now saw them, have combined to produce the ill-temper, the violence even, which, to her exceeding joy, she now no longer attributed to causes involving Oswald Langton's guilt.

"I believe I have erred sadly against the precept which bids us, 'think no evil,' said she, putting her hand into Cecilia's, "and I am heartily grieved for the pain my injustice has given."

"Then," replied Cecilia, "then I have not come here in vain, and I may tell Oswald so!"

"Ah, but you must not tell him what I believed —what I fancied at least about him—he must never know that!"

"Not the particular thing in itself, certainly; but, my own Kate, if the dearest wish of my

heart should be granted, and you become Oswald's wife, it is of importance that he should not attribute your waverings either to coldness or to caprice, as he must do, if your conduct is left totally unexplained. Allow me to tell him, in general, that your hesitation and your unhappiness were caused by some doubt of his principles; and I engage for him, that he will respect your feeling too much for any levity, any misplaced curiosity, ever to tempt him to allude to it. This amount of openness will involve no betrayal of the woman whose secret you desire to keep. It is needless to say you have a secret at all; but it will be an honest explanation, and as such the best that can be given."

Katherine reflected for a minute or two, and then replied, "I believe you are right. I only wish I could be as honest with mamma! But if I told her what I told you (besides that she would never be satisfied without hearing more), the mischief she would unintentionally do is incalculable!"

* * * * *

Mrs. Oakly, whose imaginative powers had failed to inspire her with any other solution for her daughter's conduct than waywardness and caprice, was perfectly contented—no, the phrase is too weak—"absolutely enchanted," when it was made known to her "that Cecilia's conversation with Katherine had convinced her of having done wrong in adhering to a resolution, hastily formed in Paris, against Oswald Langton, whom

she had now determined to accept." Thoroughly satisfied with the result, Mrs. Oakly asked neither why nor wherefore, only declaring, "that there never was anyone like Cecilia for managing fanciful young people," and avowing herself so pleased and grateful, that Annie instantly asked, and obtained, leave to announce her sister's decision *herself* in the following lines:

"MY DEAR MR. LANGTON,

"Cecy and I, between us, have brought Kate to her senses, and she confesses that, though she took (it seems) a horrid dislike to you in Paris last year, nothing will make her so happy *now* as your coming here as soon as you possibly can, to see her, mamma, papa, and

"Your affectionate 'little friend,'

"ANNIE OAKLY."

Annie's note was signed, sealed, and dispatched; and then, but not till then, did Mrs. Oakly's delight receive a check in the remembrance that *she* too should have to write letters! for now that the time of doing so was actually at hand, her previous confidence in the approbation of her brothers-in-law in great measure deserted her, and she exclaimed, in her old plaintive tone, "What will the Desboroughs say!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"WHAT would the Desboroughs say?" that was the question, which, when all other doubts and difficulties had been happily put an end to, was constantly recurring to everyone concerned. Would they at once, and decidedly, reject all idea of the contemplated union? Or would they, after having behaved (by anticipation) as though no man within the compass of the four seas could be considered a fitting suitor for the ward of whom *they* had the disposal, calm down into acquiescence, when a regular "treaty of marriage," approved of by the said ward and her mother, was in due form laid before them? Mr. Oakly expected them to take the former line, while Mrs. Oakly's wishes inclined her to hope they might choose the latter. The Messieurs Desborough adopted neither. They did not "utterly and absolutely" refuse consent to what they could only defer—not prevent—nor yet would they "sanction," and thereby forward, what they had the power of deferring.

The middle course, to which they resorted, was that of being generally disagreeable, and of so availing themselves of their power, while they had

it, as to enjoy the satisfaction of giving some vent to that ill-humour, respecting Aunt Judith's will, which the thought of their niece's marriage, no matter with whom, invariably stirred up. Herbert Desborough's inward irritation was probably all the greater because, having condescended to express strong and unqualified approbation of Oswald Langton a month back, he could not so easily designate him as a "needy adventurer" now; nor could he, as he was fully aware, bring forward any other objection to the marriage of two persons who (as Mrs. Oakly stated) "were so deeply and sincerely attached," than the indisputable fact that the fortune of the intended bridegroom would not equal that of the bride. He was therefore forced to content himself with inditing, at proper intervals—and allowing due time for the receipt, consideration, and full answering of the same—a series of letters, in which, notwithstanding professions of his "respect for Mr. Langton's family, esteem for his eldest son," and "gratitude for the service he had lately rendered to his nephew, Frederick," he continued to put forward everything that could be urged against the marriage, in the manner best calculated to "punish" the inhabitants of Shadworth for their lack of wealth, and the inhabitants of Wyngate for their want of regard for that deficiency. These pleasant documents contained also—as is usual, indeed, when the match proposed is not a "very good one" (Anglicè, better than the young lady's friends had any right

to expect)—some stern decrees respecting the "attached pair," and the amount of "probation" with which their attachment should or ought to be tested.

"It would," observed Mr. Herbert Desborough, in his first and most dignified epistle, "be only our duty to give one who has seen so little of society and of the world, time to look about her, and to consider well the nature of her own feelings;" and he therefore concluded by advising that, "for the present," neither party should be shackled by an engagement, which, if both continued in the same mind after the lapse of six or eight months, might just as well be entered into then as now.

Whether Mrs. Oakly would of herself have had the spirit to contest the point, cannot be known; but as there were those about her who were not likely to submit without a struggle, she even gathered courage to remonstrate so effectually, that between her perseverance and the Desboroughs' growing perception of the uselessness of quarrelling about a thing they could not eventually hinder, and which after all "might have been worse," a sort of treaty of compromise was agreed to. The result of it was that, somewhere about Christmas, the Messieurs Desborough consented to acknowledge Katherine and Oswald Langton as an "engaged pair," free to announce themselves as such to all their friends and acquaintance; while Mrs. Oakly agreed, on the other hand, to postpone all discussion of times, seasons, and plans,

till after Easter, about which period the Herbert Desboroughs expected to return from Bournemouth, whither they were now repairing for the health of one of their children.

"It is really very provoking," said Langton one afternoon to Katherine, as they were going out together to call on old Mrs. Tynedale, "it is very provoking to see you looking as calm and contented as if those curmudgeons of uncles of yours did not exist!"

"Why, the fact is I *feel* contented; and, in truth, my uncles have been much less disagreeable than I expected."

"What, when our wedding is a thing 'not to be talked of even' till after Easter, and when I just heard your mother give it as her opinion, confidentially, to Mrs. Selwyn, that it could hardly take place before Midsummer, *if then?*"

"I should be very unhappy if my uncles had refused their consent altogether, or stuck to their first advice about our 'remaining unshackled,' and all that; for if they had, I suppose mamma would have been afraid to let us meet; but whatever comes, we have *her* consent, and before this time next year I shall be free to do as I please!"

"Before this time next year!—how coolly you talk! Who knows what might befall before then?" cried he.

"No," replied Katherine, gravely, "we can only *know* one thing; which is, that if you and I are living, we shall be as much bound to each

other then as now. What should part us after such a solemn engagement—after mamma's approval of it, too?"

"Nothing *should*, Kate! and I feel inclined to say nothing *can*. Yet I have seen such strange things in life, that a dread of what may come to pass gets hold of me at times, and drives me nearly mad."

"That is very silly of you, Oswald."

"I suppose it is—I *hope* it is! But do you know, Kate, it is very good of me to believe that you know the least in the world what love is, when I see you before me as pleased as possible, and quite indifferent whether we are married now or next December."

"I can't think why you should object to my feeling happy; I have been so *very* happy ever since that final letter of Uncle Herbert's, that came on Wednesday morning. It seems to me that we are so extremely well off! You are staying here now, and your father and Cecilia are coming tomorrow, lest they should claim you for Christmas week. Then I am to go back with you all to Shadworth, where Cecilia was never allowed to have me before. And after that, you are to be with Spencer and Alicia, and will ride over here every day; and when you leave them, I suppose you will be coming here again. Then, you know, when the Spring comes, I am engaged to pay another visit at the Moat, and I shall show you my favourite walks, and you will help me to hunt

for those exquisite wild flowers! Indeed, Oswald, I don't think I can ever be grateful enough for so much happiness!"

Her lover gazed with admiration on the serene openness of the countenance she turned to him, and said with emotion:

"The truth is, Kate, that you are more hopeful than I; which, as you are ten years and a half younger, is only natural; while I, though having the promise of what I had despaired of, want it secured to me, in order to believe it is all real!"

"Well," replied Katherine, gaily, "the reality of it is very agreeably proved to *me*, and a very happy reality, too! I used to be so often in the wrong, even when I was doing many things I didn't like, to please mamma; whereas now I am always spoken of as the best of girls, and of daughters, because I am pleasing myself; and mamma thinks it is so 'good' of me, if I condescend to take the least trouble for her or for anybody! Now I think that to have risen so much in the scale of creation is a very solid advantage indeed; don't you?" inquired she, with an arch look and smile, which was somewhat infectious; for her lover's countenance became almost as bright as her own, while he admitted "that such promotion was not to be despised."

"But," continued he, in a tone which, though lively, was not entirely a joking one, "for all you think so much of the advantages of your position, may not *I* be excused for living in some dread lest

your mother, if 'given time for consideration' (as your uncles are so desirous we should all be), may get free from her present fortunate illusion, and wake up one fine morning to discover (what is true enough so far) that your humble servant is most unworthy of his good luck, and that her 'best of daughters' is doing the silliest and most perverse thing she ever did in her life? How do I know she will think as well of me next Easter—which falls very late, too—as she does at this instant? No—no; I am not quite conceited enough to feel at all sure of that; and therefore it is my intention, when a few weeks are passed and gone . . . ."

"Not to urge mamma to try and extract more concessions from my uncles, I hope! For, indeed, it would be unfair to ask her to do that, after she has been so very kind in saying and doing things which are a much greater effort to her than you can conceive. It would be useless, too—and worse than useless—for, if my uncles were irritated by what they might call an 'encroachment,' you know they *have* the power of issuing commands which would make us really miserable. Suppose we were forbidden to meet till after next October! Dear Oswald, I implore of you not to do or say anything that might cost us the great happiness we possess!"

As she thus pleaded for her "great happiness," her eyes met Langton's, with an expression which went far to exonerate her from the charge of that

indifference he had half reproached her with five minutes back; he hastened to allay her fears; and before they reached Mrs. Tynedale's door, he had given his word to make no attempt, direct or indirect, against the "treaty" which afforded them so many good things.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE approach of Spring was bright and visible in the gay and sunny aspect of the Shadworth garden, in its budding trees and blooming flower-beds, which Cecilia Langton was admiring from the drawing-room window, one fine April morning, when she was somewhat surprised to hear Lewis Markham's voice in the hall, inquiring for her father and herself. She had believed him to be still at Rome, whither he had accompanied a friend late in Autumn, and as she rose to welcome him on his entrance, her first words were an inquiry of "what had sent him back to England without waiting for the Holy Week?"

"Why, you know," replied he, "that both my friend Eastwood's interests and my own lie more in the ancient monuments than in modern sights and processions (of which, by the way, we saw plenty at Christmas); so when he got a touch of Roman fever, which there seemed small chance of his entirely shaking off *there*, and when, simultaneously with his decision to quit the Eternal City, I received letters from my aunt here at Fenhurst, asking my advice about some business embarrass-

ments which seemed to annoy and depress her exceedingly, I considered that the Holy Week might keep for another time; and determining to come home immediately, made the best of my way to Fenhurst, which I reached yesterday. They tell me Mr. Langton is out; Oswald, I knew, was away; for I came across him yesterday on the Seckford platform, and gave him my best wishes then and there. He was in too great a hurry to be stopped for questions, so I come to you for information as to when the wedding takes place, and what the Desboroughs say to it?"

Cecilia, who judged by Markham's tone that he meant and wished to be viewed as a person no farther concerned with the matter than through friendly interest in the parties, replied that she could give no precise answer to his first query. "For," continued she, "though the Mr. Desboroughs have not now quite the power they had at Wyngate, still, Mrs. Oakly does not like to displease them by anticipating the period till which she had engaged to defer all thoughts of 'naming a day,' or settling plans; for which, I must confess, I do not thing she is now in any hurry herself."

"No? she has not changed her mind yet?" asked Markham, quickly.

"Oh, not the least; but since Kate's engagement has freed her from some very foolish anxieties, I perceive she is willing—desirous even—to delay an event which—she now sees—brings with it a

loss to herself that she never, till lately, looked on in that light."

"I understand," said Markham, "understand perfectly; but I am glad to hear you allude to a diminished influence of those brothers-in-law of hers; I wish, for George Oakly's sake, it were altogether annihilated!"

"And except as regards Fred," returned Miss Langton, "I trust it soon will be; for—but you have surely heard that Mr. Oakly has gained his law-suit?"

"Not I! you must recollect I am fresh from Rome, and my good cousin is not much of a correspondent, while my poor aunt here has been too full of her own sorrows and difficulties to talk to me of much else since my arrival: it is the best piece of news I have heard for one while."

"But I have more for you," continued Cecilia, "for within these ten days, Mr. Oakly has had a legacy from an old godfather (from whom he never expected a farthing), which has put it in his power to discharge half of his debt to the Desboroughs at once, while his changed position, in other respects, enables him to raise money to pay the other half presently."

"Thank God he is free from that fetter!" cried Markham, warmly; "there was never a more galling one; he may call his soul his own again now."

"Yes," returned Cecilia; "and on the strength of this recovered freedom, I believe he has promised

Oswald to say something (after Easter) to Kate's uncles, which will hurry their proceedings a little—as much, at least, as his wife will allow him; for—besides her wish to put things off till her sister, Mrs. Murray, and her girls are with them—I can see there is another thing she will wait for, and that is, Fred's return from abroad, in order—as she says—that he may 'give his sister away.'"

"Give his sister away!" repeated Markham; "well, I have no objection; and I do suppose Master Fred's presence at a family solemnity is of some consequence to his poor mother, whatever it may be to other people. But what is that young gentlemen doing abroad? or, rather, where is he just now?"

"In Florence, I believe; and his mother seems to expect him to remain some time there," answered Miss Langton.

Markham was silent for a moment, and then observed, "that it had been, no doubt, highly desirable to take Fred out of the way and out of the reach of some particularly objectionable companions. But," continued he, "though I daresay I should have hit on no better expedient for keeping the young fellow out of positive notoriety than the one resorted to, I wish he may not fall 'out of the frying-pan into the fire,' among the English of his own standing in Florence, or in Rome, if he goes on there."

"Every course has its dangers," returned

Cecilia, "and he is likely to meet his full share wherever he goes; but his mother thinks that those he might be exposed to from wild company abroad are, just now at least, neutralized through the notice taken of him by the Carews, who are at Florence, and whose house is thought likely to be attractive enough to hinder his being tempted to seek elsewhere for more lively society."

"He will hardly find anything more attractive than her ladyship's own self," said he, with a smile, "or anything more lively—in the sense of sparing no pains to please and amuse—if I heard a true report of her from a man I met in Rome just before leaving it, whose sister had seen and heard a good deal of her, both in Paris and since, at the Baths of Lucca."

"Then do tell me, Mr. Markham, what impression were you given as to the sort of esteem she was held in?"

"In very little, I should be apt to fear, if there were any truth in my informant's tales about her and a Parisian admirer of hers, who followed her to Italy, but whose attentions, I was told, were already becoming remarkable, 'when a young lady, a *Miss Desborough*, who was on a visit to her in Paris, left her suddenly to return home.' Now I confess I had been rather surprised, in the summer, to notice the very sober view that a 'Miss Desborough' seemed to take of her late sojourn in Paris, and all therewith connected; but I have since thought whether—besides other causes—this

wonderful sobriety might not have arisen out of a lurking doubt of her hostess' perfect discretion. Not, of course," added he, "that I the least suppose her to have suspected the nature and amount of criticism the lady's levity had excited."

"No," replied Cecilia, "it was not probable she should; and I have never liked to ask any questions that could give me certainty on the subject. But however it is, I cannot bear, though only looking back on it, to think of her having been in such close contact with a person of whom I have heard unpleasant reports before (though not so distinctly), and of whom I knew—have known for some time, beyond a doubt—that she admitted most objectionable persons to form part of her female society in Paris. I am sure Oswald doesn't like Lady Carew; but more than that I have never learnt from him; I suspect a feeling similar to mine—only perhaps still stronger—of horror at Kate's having had such a woman for a friend, makes the subject too hateful to allow him patience to touch on it. With respect to Fred, of course it is different; but still . . ."

"But still," continued he, as she paused, "Lady Carew's house is an odd one to be looked to as a safe harbour, for a young man who is supposed to have something of a talent for finding his way to whatever kind of mischief is open to him! Well, I trust, for the sake of his family, that he will get into no irremediable scrapes; but I confess I was hugely disgusted with him last Autumn; most particularly for his utter lack of warmth or right

feeling towards Oswald! He seemed to be so much more humiliated by the obligation, than thankful for the service; which (especially considering that his benefactor was your brother) appears to me inexplicable on any ground, save that of the most odious description of pride. It is in that respect I think him so much behind your brother Alexander, who gives you all trouble enough, to be sure; but then, to do him justice, he *is* obliged to you when you have done him a good turn."

"Yet I almost wish Alexander had a little more pride," observed Cecilia, in such a desponding tone, that Markham almost doubted whether he ought not to turn the conversation immediately away from that unprofitable member of the family. But he conquered the weakness which, under the disguise of "consideration for the feelings," often leads us to avoid the subject on which we might bestow sympathy; and, with more real kindness, he inquired "how Alexander was getting on at present?"

He had known so much—had indeed been so often consulted—both by Oswald and herself about Alexander, that it was natural she should answer this question with a somewhat detailed account of all that had happened, in the last three months, either to distress or to reassure her.

"He says he is going to turn over a new leaf," said she, as she concluded her unsatisfactory narration, "and, for the moment, I believe it is true he is going on very quietly in Mr. Lane's

Parsonage, out of the way of the Humes and Fred Desborough, whose wealth and position (and whose attractive qualities I may add) render him a much more dangerous companion for Alexander than those who only knew their respective ages could easily believe. But he can't stay where he is for ever, and when Oswald (who—for as little as it is —has more influence over him than anyone else) is not at hand, I feel sadly helpless. I don't know how it is, but Spencer's words of advice, though they may be as good and sensible in themselves, are never half so much heeded; and Henry, who is more like Oswald in some respects, appears to have forgotten that he has either a home or a country."

"Well," said Markham, with a sort of smile, which, if the expression were strictly correct, might be called a *grave* one, "when Oswald is out of the way, you must just make a brother of me. I have given Alexander an odd lecture or two before now; he has never taken it ill—so—if you are ever in a difficulty about him, I depend upon your applying to me. I think we are sufficiently old friends to tell each other plainly wherein the one can ever be of use to the other."

"I wish I could be of use to you, Mr. Markham, or ever expect to be so!" cried Cecilia warmly.

"You can be very useful," said he, smiling, "if you will only help me not to become misanthropical amid my (so-called) good fortune, by letting me see and feel that the old ties of early friendship

and good neighbourhood, are not—in this quarter at least—slackened by time and the events time brings; but allowed to be drawn closer, and cemented by every exchange of kindness which befits the intercourse of those who have never ceased to value each other."

"I should not have thought," answered she, "that much effort would have been needed to save you from misanthropy (it is the last disease I should expect to threaten *you!*); but I will not be wanting —I can find no difficulty—"

She grew somewhat confused in her attempts to express the precise degree of sympathy which would soothe—not wound—the feelings to which Markham probably alluded, when speaking of a disposition to "become misanthropical." She could not doubt his having penetration enough to guess that she must know of his disappointment of the preceding summer; but as he had never spoken of it then, she *did* doubt as to whether she was, or was not, expected to show how clearly she comprehended now. He, however, did not seem to notice her present embarrassment; he neither helped her to finish her sentence, nor appeared to look for a termination to it, but sat musingly silent for a while, and then said abruptly, as he rose:

"I was going away without asking the particular question my aunt charged me to bring an answer to. Were you surprised about Oswald's marriage at first, or no?"

"I can hardly say I was," answered Cecilia,

coloring; "but it would take a long time to explain why *that* was not my predominant feeling, when I learnt it was to be."

"Ah, yes, I have no doubt you were aware of a great deal which—in fact I shall tell my aunt you were 'not surprised;' and I daresay you will kindly give *her* all your reasons at length, the first time you afford her the treat of an afternoon at Fenhurst. *I* was not surprised," continued he, as he stood with his hat in his hand, but without moving towards the door, "not surprised at least to hear of Kate's engagement; for I had long been convinced of her having a strong prepossession in some quarter—not because of what you are of course aware took place last August—but from the manner of what then occurred. In fact I now wonder at my own stupidity in not guessing farther than I did at the time; only I was misled by recollecting how little she had wished to go to the Moat. To be sure she did not then expect—but it became afterwards evident to me how it was with her, though I could not, at the time, know if the fortunate man were one worthy of his happiness, as I did not hear about Oswald till after I was abroad."

Whether he would, if undisturbed, have dilated farther on this theme, Cecilia could not decide; for at that moment her father came in, and Markham, instantly clearing his brow from the grave shadow which had temporarily overspread it, congratulated Mr. Langton, in the frankest and most cheerful

tone, on his son's prospects, adding that he purposed, in the course of the next few days (now that the opening of the branch railway had brought Wyngate so much nearer), to run over from Fenhurst, for an hour or so, to see them all there, and give his good wishes in person.

After a little more talk on indifferent subjects, and a promise on Lewis Markham's part to come again to discuss "Rome in the nineteenth century," on the morrow, he took his leave.

When he had departed, Mr. Langton observed to his daughter, "that he was glad to see Markham was taking things so easily; for," proceeded he, "if he had been half as much in love as Oswald is, he would hardly be so cool and comfortable under the mortification."

"I don't think," said Cecilia, "that he is either so cool or so comfortable as you suppose; and he certainly was—I don't know but he still is—very much in love with Kate; but he has great self-command, is generous and high-minded in no common degree; and then, papa," added she, smiling, "since you always like to find out some little qualification to an extra piece of virtue, I will grant that it was natural in *him* to acquiesce in his fate at once, from his being, as it seems he was, satisfied immediately that he was rejected for the sake of some more favoured mortal, whereas Oswald, even while being refused at the Moat, felt instinctively that no one else was preferred to him, which makes all the difference."

Mr. Langton allowed "there was something in that;" at all events, he was pleased to see Markham as friendly and cheerful as ever; and thought he was doing "the sensible thing," in contemplating a speedy visit to Wyngate, to get over all the awkwardnesses at once—and before the wedding. "By the way, Cecy, do you imagine he will be asked to it?"

"Indeed, papa, I don't suppose they have got so near the event as to think about their company yet;" and after having given this reply, she silently began to spin a long web of reflections, founded on her father's assumption of Lewis Markham's "coolness and comfort," and on the equally contradictory and unsatisfactory habit obtaining in the world, of blaming those who show their feelings, as being deficient in self-control, and scorning those who repress them, as devoid of all sensibility. "I believe," continued she to herself, "that my father really likes Lewis Markham; yet he does not do him half justice!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

Katherine Desborough's existence had, meanwhile, glided on in calm serenity. She was satisfied with what the present offered, she looked forward peacefully to the future, and if between Christmas and April some slight annoyances arose to "remind her she was a mortal," the store of happiness she possessed was ample enough to enable her to bear them without any painful exercise of the duty of patience. Of these trifling annoyances, the first in date was the recollection that she owed a letter to Lady Carew. Now setting aside all other feelings, there was an awkwardness about writing, in December, to announce her engagement to the very same man whom that very same correspondent had commended her for refusing in June; and she put it off from day to day, till she at last contented herself with the reflection that, as Fred was now at Florence, he would naturally repeat to a person he was in the constant habit of meeting, the all-important piece of family news which his mother had hastened to impart to him the moment the "consent" of the Mr. Desboroughs—if one might

give it that name—had been obtained. She flattered herself, too, that Lady Carew might discover, in the indirect style of this communication, a token that she need not be at the trouble of noticing it formally, and might farther understand that a correspondence such as theirs might well be allowed to die a natural death.

Katherine had once before cherished a similar hope; but she was again doomed to be disappointed; for not long after Mrs. Oakly had transmitted to her daughter—worded in her own way, and translated into her own phraseology—whatever it had pleased "dear Fred" to write by way of congratulation, there arrived an epistle from Lady Carew, rallying her friend—good-humoredly—for her shyness to avow on paper that she had "changed her mind;" wishing her every happiness, and then proceeding, in an off-hand fashion, to inquire about the time of her marriage, the plans for her wedding tour, etc.; the whole wound up with a request for a speedy reply. This reply cost Katherine no small time and pains; but was at last achieved—so far successfully as to be a perfectly polite one, and as little stiff in its wording as, under the circumstances, could be expected. Her utter and entire deliverance from the suspicion—the belief rather—which had so long tormented her, could not, though restoring Langton to her good opinion, by any means do the same for Lady Carew. She hated to begin "My dear Isabella;" she hated to end with "Yours affectionately;"

she hated to answer her questions about her approaching marriage; hated to thank her for congratulations she did not believe to be sincere; and, above all, she hated to have any dealings with a woman, the bare naming of whom reminded her of the strange coincidences which had led her for a time to withhold her esteem from Oswald. That esteem had become so thorough, so entire, that any remembrance of its interruption made her—even when alone—blush at herself for ever having conceived a thought injurious to him who now appeared to her as right-minded, as clear in every matter of principle, great and small, as he was taking in manner, and in all the external qualities which strike the heart through the imagination. Thus the very sense of having "done Oswald injustice," tended to increase her repugnance for either communicating with—or making mention of—the person respecting whom she had acquired the "evil *certainty*" of what others merely conjectured. That Oswald himself shared these conjectures, she was sure; and that not *only* from his present disinclination to speak of her under whose roof they had originally met, but still more from her recollection of those singular warnings against the society she was then living in, which (as she now interpreted the riddles of those days) had doubtless created the ill feeling of Lady Carew towards the author of them, that had finally burst forth, in glowing indignation, on discovering in him the humble servant of her guest, rather than

of herself. Katherine considered it, therefore, as only natural, when she felt—rather by instinct than by positive experience—that Oswald shared her wish to avoid that kind of conversation (so precious to lovers, in general) which turns upon the scenes and places where love first arose; and she was glad to be thus spared the necessity of constantly talking of, and alluding to, one concerning whom she could not allow herself to express her real sentiments. She sometimes, indeed, wondered whether the ill opinion of Lady Carew held by her future husband, was of an amount to render him likely, when he actually became such, to forbid the correspondence altogether; but it was not necessary to ascertain that point beforehand; and she preferred making no remark, either to him or to anyone else, upon the disagreeables entailed by her former friend's determination to "keep up with her." Katherine was fortunate, however (and knew herself to be fortunate), in having no greater disagreeables to encounter; and she was also singularly happy in learning—after a very short apprenticeship—discretion enough to lead the life of an "engaged young lady," yet have no quarrels with her family, and very few with her intended. She shewed Oswald the amusing letter in which Frederick did, at last, personally offer his somewhat tardy congratulations; but refrained from confiding to him her suspicion that in his previous letter to her mother (which she had never let out of her own

hands) he had perhaps expressed sentiments that would not have pleased either of them ; and she as carefully buried in her own breast her perception of certain tokens of that vacillating nature of her mother's, to which she was only too well accustomed, but which, if made known to her lover, would have driven him half distracted. The truth simply was, that Mrs. Oakly—now happily freed, by her daughter's engagement, from the uneasy consciousness of having duties by her which she did not like to perform, and responsibilities towards her brothers-in-law which she could not throw upon anyone else—was by this time chiefly sensible of a desire "to keep dear Kate with her as long as she possibly could." She knew that her first husband's family, and her neighbour, Mrs. Selwyn (whose second daughter was about to contract a very brilliant alliance), thought Langton "but a poor match for Miss Desborough;" and though her knowledge of this by no means altered her sentiments towards him, it gave her such a nervous dread of being thought precipitate, as to make her doubly anxious that certain influential persons among her own and her daughter's connections should see, and—as she hoped—"be delighted with" the bridegroom she had considered deserving of so much favour. This fancy of Mrs. Oakly's to enable herself to tell one half of her friends how much her son-in-law elect had been appreciated by the remaining half, combined itself so strongly with her other feeling of the "necessity" for the

presence at the wedding of "dear Fred," who was not expected home much before Midsummer, that she could not contrive even to *wish* the marriage to take place earlier; and when her husband, in the full glee of his recovered independence, volunteered a promise to Langton "to put in a word for him, and for an early day, when he did his own business with the Desboroughs," her daughter read plainly in her countenance an expression which betokened no help from her.

There was something in this desire of her mother's to collect "golden opinions" about Oswald, which half amused Katherine; though she was not without her fears lest the exhibited individual should some day perceive what was going on, and rebelliously frustrate the good intentions of those who asked him to go into the drawing-room in his hunting-dress on this occasion, or on that urged him to tell some particular story about his travels in Spain. Mrs. Oakly's innocent little plots were, for the most part, successful; but her greatest triumph was achieved when, towards the end of Lent, Mrs. Manvers, only sister to Mrs. Herbert Desborough, spent three days at Wyngate, and condescended to express a favourable opinion of the gentleman who was to have the honour of becoming her brother-in-law's nephew. The stock of confidence derived from this visit, and from its probable effect on the minds of the Desboroughs, to whom, from old habit, though no longer from necessity, she was still apt to revert as to the arbiters of her destiny,

caused Mrs. Oakly to live on, for awhile, in a state of pleased contentment, which all around her partook of, and which remained unbroken till, a day or two before Passion Week, Katherine's, at least, was considerably disturbed by the receipt of a letter from Lady Carew, dated London! It explained that some business (brought upon him by the recent death of a relation) had unexpectedly obliged Sir Edward to return to England, and remain for some weeks in Town; of the darkness and dulness of which, as contrasted with Italian skies and Italian society, the writer complained bitterly.

Katherine had so entirely reckoned on Isabella's remaining on the Continent for years, and was so totally unprepared for the numberless disagreeables and difficulties to which she might be exposed by her old friendship, and by her connection (through her aunt) with a person concerning whom her mind had undergone such a terrible change, that she found it a hard matter to conceal her dismay as she read the letter. She was thankful that Oswald was absent (having gone to Shadworth for a few days), as it was easier for her, when he was not by, to act the sort of part she felt herself compelled to; but from that moment a sensation came over her, as if the peaceful days of her engagement were at an end; and she began to experience a restless wish that her marriage-day should be at least "talked of." "Suppose Isabella were to find it duller and duller in London, and to propose my

going up to her to order my trousseau!" She endeavoured to dismiss the notion as a foolish one; but bugbears of a kindred nature were for ever assailing her; and when, in the course of the next day, her mother and stepfather were perturbed, in their turn, by a letter from Fred, dated Paris, very cavalierly informing his family (who had not expected him for nearly three months to come) "that he should be in London almost as soon as they received his epistle, and at Wyngate the instant he had got over some business in Town," she began to fasten eagerly upon the hope that her mother would not now object to Mr. Oakly's "speaking seriously to the Desboroughs about Kate's affairs." Nobody was thinking of them at that moment, however; for her stepfather was much more intent upon learning "what Fred had done with poor Burgess, who went with him on the understanding they were to stay six months abroad, at least." "Does he tell you?" asked he, of his wife.

"No, there's nothing about that—a mere line, you see, scratched off in a hurry, just to say he is coming; but I have no doubt Mr. Burgess has been able to join some other party; such an unexceptionable young man would find no difficulty. I wish I knew what day dear Fred will be able to come down to us!"

"I daresay the first he has nothing he particularly fancies doing in Town," said Mr. Oakly. "I wonder what the Desboroughs will say to his

finding his way back, at least two months sooner than they counted on!"

"They can't object, I'm sure," returned his wife, "when all the talk they wished to put an end to has so completely died out. There's no reason now for his keeping away from us all."

"Perhaps not," replied Mr. Oakly; "but they mayn't be the better pleased for his choosing to come home without consulting them; and I think you must write this very day to his uncle Herbert, to let *him*, at any rate, know we are expecting the youngster. They will have to bestir themselves now, and set every engine at work to get him his commission; it's the only chance for a lad like him."

This reminder of the necessity of writing to Herbert Desborough operated as a sore damper on the exuberant delight with which Mrs. Oakly was looking forward to the return of her favourite child; but it *was* a necessity, and she sat down submissively to her task. What she precisely said, Katherine never knew; but when Mr. Oakly came in to read to his wife what *he* was writing on his own account, about his own affairs, to her brother-in-law, her daughter learnt what enabled her to tell Oswald, when he arrived from Shadworth, a little before dinner-time, that her eldest and most influential uncle *had* been reminded that times and seasons were to be talked of after Easter. "Fred's coming has removed a great many of mamma's reasons for delay; and, though she

would not venture much herself, I see she will not object to Mr. Oakly's doing all he can to get my uncles to make up their minds."

"Then I am mightily indebted to master Fred! —that is, if his uncles don't visit his contempt of their authority on you and me. You expect him to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Mamma does, but . . . ."

"But *you* don't feel so confident?"

"Mr. Oakly is not, I see; and I am half afraid that he is right, and that poor mamma will be disappointed."

Disappointed Mrs. Oakly certainly was; for not till she had spent several days in anxious expectation, and not till Oswald Langton had, according to an old promise, gone to pay a short visit at the Moat, did the longed-for guest appear. His mother, who had given him up for that day (it was already late in the afternoon), was not yet returned from her drive, and as Annie and the younger girls were gone with Miss Freeman on a rambling stroll after primroses and blue-bells, no one except Katherine was at home to receive him. He greeted her affectionately; but said, the moment he had kissed her:

"You have read my congratulations long ago, Kate, so it's no use repeating them; tell me though, is Langton here?"

"No, Fred; he is gone to the Moat, and won't be back till to-morrow; you know we couldn't tell for certain when you were likely to come."

"Of course you couldn't, my dear; and—truth to speak—I am just as well pleased he is *not* here this first day of my running down. I am glad to have you all to myself once more, with no one to interfere and think he has a better right to you! Kate, I don't half like your marrying! Very wicked of me, I suppose, but I can't help it—can't help being rather put out at it, I mean. I thought you would have kept on as you are a bit longer; and, in case the fellows at the Horse Guards don't hurry themselves about my commission, it would have been such fun for me to take you to Italy to pay another visit to Lady Carew, as soon as she can get away again! I can tell you she wanted of all things to have you, till she found you were 'better engaged.'"

"It is very kind of her; but I have not the violent curiosity I once had about the Continent."

"No?—that's a change I did not look for—in you, at least, Kate! No curiosity? and 'it's very kind of her!' Such a formal, cold way of talking of the warmest-hearted, most generous creature I ever yet saw in woman's shape! Kate! you are not worthy of such a friend!"

"I am not in the habit of going into ecstasies, Fred, but I believe I am to the full as much attached to Isabella Carew as she is to me."

"May be," he replied, shrugging his shoulders; "different people have different ways of showing their regard; yours, I must say, are of the coolest; and I have been used lately to hear pro-

fessions of attachment—when made—made with something more of life and soul! There's the carriage though, and I must apologise to my mother for having been such a naughty boy in not coming sooner; but I really was wanted in London; Lady Carew had literally no one to go about anywhere with her."

So saying, he flew to meet Mrs. Oakly, who, the moment the agitation of her first meeting with him was over, carried off her darling to her dressing-room, "to enjoy a long talk," undisturbed. The "talk" was not, perhaps, over long for that of a mother and son who had been parted for several months, but it was so much longer than Fred was used to indulge his parent with, that it struck his sister as something remarkable, and the more so when she observed, at dinner time, that her mother wore on her face a degree of that annoyed, anxious look which always indicated that something disagreeable had been said to her, or that she was in doubt or difficulty with regard to her own plans. Katherine hoped the difficulty was not a fresh one concerning Fred himself, with whose outward appearance, at any rate, his family had reason to be satisfied, for an increased air of manliness rendered his height and his beauty even more striking than formerly; though, on the other hand, an attentive observer might have traced in his manner a shade more of superciliousness than when he bid his friends farewell in November. His sister fancied that he a little resented her

coolness about Lady Carew, of whom he spoke, at dinner, in terms of enthusiastic admiration; but his stay was too short for her to make sure, since he returned to Town next morning, after breakfast, in spite of his mother's entreating looks, and her murmured pleading "that she had hoped he would have remained with them that day at least, to see Oswald."

Mrs. Oakly's mental disquiet, whatever might be its nature, was evidently not removed; for her countenance still betrayed it, even after she might have been expected to have got over her disappointment at losing "dear Fred" so soon again. She talked a good deal, nevertheless, about him, and his good looks, and his shining talents, and her gratitude to the Carews for their hospitality to him, till at last she finished a disjointed sentence in praise of Isabella, and her kindess to both her children, with the observation "that she was sorry, though, that *she*—or *anybody*—should have been made aware of what happened last summer at the Moat."

This remark explained everything; for as Katherine had never herself informed her mother, or indeed anyone, of her having thought it necessary to make known her first refusal of Oswald to Lady Carew, it was clear that *she* must have communicated it, in her own way, to Fred, whose sarcastic observations on it to her mother, she could the better imagine, as she had at once seen—and still saw—the effects of them, in the weather-glass of the changeful countenance before her. She did

her best, however, to repress all tokens of her own annoyance, and replied cheerfully:

"Well, mamma, perhaps I had rather people did not know; but Fred's being aware of it can't do any harm, I think."

"No harm—no," murmured Mrs. Oakly, "of course not that—and dear Fred only wondered—but, still—it is not desirable, you know, Kate, that it should be thought by anyone beyond the family, or indeed by any *of* the family, that—in short, my dear—it may be very foolish you will say—but—people *do* fancy that a man who has been refused is not valued as I have always wished your uncles to understand you valued Oswald, it being but what is true, and what was the ground I always took with them in pleading for an engagement. Now I trust this will never reach them (through Fred I know it will not), for, though I daresay you are not struck by it at all in a serious light, it would greatly annoy *me*. What would you say, Kate, to writing and begging Lady Carew not to mention what we are alluding to, to your Aunt Herbert?"

"Oh, mamma!" cried Katherine, "that would be attaching far too much importance to such a thing—would be making people imagine all kinds of nonsense! Indeed, indeed, I can't write such a letter, for I am sure it would only do mischief!"

"If that is your feeling, my dear," said Mrs. Oakly, with a disappointed look, yet borne down by her daughter's decided tone, "if that is your

impression, of course I don't like to urge it on you. Only let this be a lesson to you for the future, Kate, never unnecessarily to mention any transaction affecting yourself, out of your immediate family circle. We none of us know what may happen, nor how we may change! I am aware girls have a sentimental notion about confidence, and sharing their secrets with friends, though, as you see, it is a great pity for them even; but when you are a married woman, Kate, I can only give you, as the result of all my experience, the assurance that there is nothing through life so conducive to peace and happiness, as caution and discretion."

Katherine listened submissively to this axiom, and by her ready assent thereto probably spared herself the hearing of a considerably lengthened discourse on the subject. She was aware—too well aware—of her mother's entire lack of the good qualities she advocated; but how little did she suspect her of being *so* regardless of them, as to have, the day before, "unnecessarily" informed her son of Aunt Judith's testamentary dispositions, and that at the very moment when she was feeling annoyed by the sort of prejudice she perceived in him against his future brother-in-law!

Now as Fred had been, in his own opinion, as well as in that of sundry flatterers, entitled to look on the inheritance of his aged kinswoman as his own, the information was, naturally, more surprising than pleasing, and though he, for a wonder, put that much control on himself as to restrain an

outburst of fury, his anger did not fail to vent itself in complaints of the injustice done him, and remarks upon the "needy men who always found out heiresses, let their expectations be ever so carefully concealed."

It was well for Katherine that she knew not of this; well for her that she could not see how that ill-will towards Langton which Isabella Carew had fostered and encouraged in Fred, had now been increased ten-fold by the discovery that the property, to the possession of which he had privately looked forward as securely as to his patrimony, would, in fact, be enjoyed by the man he disliked. She was vexed enough as it was, for without knowing the whole truth, she felt sure that Fred had said disagreeable things of Oswald, and she was moreover aware that her mother, like many other weak-minded persons, was liable to be made suddenly ashamed even of her own sincere likings, when the objects of them were run down unsparingly by anyone from whose views and feelings she was unwilling to differ. She hoped, however, that on this occasion the effect might soon pass away; and it is certain that when that afternoon Oswald did return to Wyngate, Mrs. Oakly received him with as much kindness as ever; more warmly perhaps after the first greeting (at least so Katherine fancied). It was—she half imagined—as if her mother had said to herself, on again coming in contact with him, "Well, he *is* what I have always thought him; and I must make amends for having listened to a word against him!'

CHAPTER XXIV.

"DID you meet Oswald, papa?" said Cecilia to her father, on the first of the "pleasant month of May," as she saw him advancing to join her on her favorite garden seat. "He thought he might have come across you, if you had chanced to ride home through the Fenhurst Lane; he could not stay above an hour, and the half of that was taken up in setting down on this piece of paper what he came to talk to you about, for the Wyngate people have this morning received a letter from 'Uncle Herbert,' which, at last, puts it in Oswald's power to begin in earnest about 'business.'"

"This morning! and *this* afternoon Oswald is here for an hour, and *this* evening he will be back at Wyngate in time for dinner, I suppose! What a change since my time! and what a change since Christmas too! I have not yet been able to bring my ideas into unison with that branch-railway, which, I conclude," added Mr. Langton, as he somewhat lazily received the paper his daughter handed him, "appears to Oswald the most advantageous result of all civilization has brought us. But you have not told me," continued he, "how it is we have come to 'business' so soon; I am sure *I* thought the affair as likely as not to drag on till the young lady became a free-agent in November."

"I don't know," replied Cecilia, smiling, "whether it may not be the fear of her being *too* free an agent in November, that has brought matters to a crisis now. At least Oswald told me that Mr. Oakly told *him* he believed the Desboroughs never would have consented at all, were it not that if the marriage takes place *now*, they will have a voice about the settlements, whereas, if Kate were once of age, she could 'do as she pleased,' in every sense. But whatever the motive may be, Oswald is delighted of course, and unspeakably grateful to Mr. Oakly, who, poor man, now *he* is a free-agent, is able to come forward and to assume his proper place, which he has done so successfully as to bring about the clenching letter of this morning, in consequence of which the wedding will take place in the second week in June, perhaps even earlier. Oswald had no time for details; but I fancy the worry they have all lived in at Wyngate has been something indescribable; for, you see, the correspondence and the conferences of the last ten days have not been only about Kate and her affairs, but there is Fred!"

"Ah, what about Fred? any explanation of his coming home upon them all in that sudden way?"

"None that I know of, except that it was his royal will and pleasure; but his uncles were, as might be expected, furious; and they threatened—I can't remember whether it was to send him back to Mr. Burgess, or to his old private tutor's, or to . . . but whatever they said, they have come

to a sort of compromise now; and have agreed—so long as he goes on quietly—to let him for the present spend his time between his mother's house and those of his Uncles Herbert and Peter."

"Peter keeps a bachelor establishment in London," observed Mr. Langton, "and I should not have thought he would much like being encumbered with a youngster like that."

"No more should I," returned Cecilia, "especially as it would seem that Master Fred has so many 'friends' in London, that he makes much more use of Uncle Peter's abode than of his mother's. He has been *there* only twice since he came home, and then only to dine and sleep."

"I wonder what he is doing with himself in London!" said Mr. Langton, half to himself; "such very young gentlemen as he have not in general so large an assortment of ready made 'friends' in London; unless they are of a sort that . . . I hope he is not growing theatrical again; for if he gets into any fresh scrape that way, he won't have Oswald at his elbow to drag him out."

"Oh, I hope not; for Oswald tells me Kate heard him say, when he was last at Wyngate, 'that actors and actresses were horrid snobs—he couldn't think how he had ever put up with them.' So I suppose that *they*, at any rate, are not the companions he at present delights in. Perhaps he is really steadier than he was; for, if you remember, Alexander mentioned, in the note I had from him to-day about his fishing-rod, that one of

the Humes complained that, 'though he had met Desborough in Town, he couldn't get him to dine with him, or go to the play, or anything;' which looks as if he meant to keep clear of that set."

"Yes, I should say it did," replied Mr. Langton; "whether it also implies his being 'steadier,' is another matter. All men have their wild oats to sow; but I am more mistaken than ever I was in my life, if Fred Desborough's crop be not of the thickest. He has more of the devil in him than any lad of his age I ever came across!"

"And yet," returned Cecilia, "how engaging he can be! I have known too much about him ever since he was three, to fancy him likely to be always so; but I did think him so pleasing during that unlucky week he spent with us in October! He has so many gifts, too, to render him attractive in society; and he is so sure to obtain ready admittance to the best, that . . ."

"That you think it may counteract the worst! Well—it sometimes does; but Fred's a strange fellow, and with all his cleverness, I believe he would always prefer using his wits to get into a scrape, than to keep clear of one."

With this remark, Mr. Langton concluded for the present, and busied himself awhile with Oswald's paper; from which, however, he soon looked up to observe that it was a long time since they had seen Lewis Markham.

"It seems rather a long time," replied his daughter, "but it is only a week; you know he

said he should be three days at his sister's, and three days in London, and what amounted to the seventh would be taken up in travelling."

"Ah, then I daresay we shall see him drop in to morrow, about his usual time."

"I think," said Cecilia, as she looked along the walk which led from the house, "that he has 'dropped in' to-day, for I fancy I see him coming."

She was not mistaken, for in a minute more he had joined them, and sitting down between Mr. Langton and his daughter, was soon launched upon the tide of question and answer that passes between friends who—habitually meeting *every* day—have been parted for seven. London news was first discussed, and then his visit to his sister, whom he had not seen for some time, and whom he had found surrounded by her husband's relations, most of them but little known to him. Then ensued remarks upon the chances for and against pleasant conversation arising between strangers, and the longer or shorter time taken by different persons before they can venture on making themselves agreeable to each other.

"A vast amount of dulness would be spared," observed Markham, "if people would only hang round their necks a printed statement of what they would like to talk of. So much valuable time is lost, while you are putting out your mental feelers this way or that; and ten to one you don't hit upon the right thing till you and your

temporary companion are about to part!—Now and then you may be lucky enough to get at it sooner, as I did the other day at my sister's, when, as I was sitting by the remarkably shy curate of the Parish, of whom Mary avers 'that she has never heard the sound of his voice except in Church,' some trifle made me aware that he was brother to that unlucky wight Burgess, who went abroad last Autumn with Fred Desborough. Of course as soon as the 'shy curate' had discovered that I had a personal acquaintance with his brother's most wilful and capricious charge, we grew confidential in a trice."

"Then perhaps," said Mr. Langton, "as you became so confidential with his tutor's brother, you can enlighten Cecilia and me as to what brought him home in such a hurry?"

"Why, according to Burgess, no sooner had the Carews settled to leave Florence, than he declared the place to be no longer habitable; neither was any other city—were it Rome or Naples, or Vienna or Paris—so it followed that he travelled after them—or with them—I don't know which; while, as my friend's brother had made his arrangements on the plan of staying longer, and could not alter them without great inconvenience and some expense, he staid behind; and I should think must—taking one thing with another—be, on the whole, as well off without his—so called—pupil."

"And he, I hear, is now spending his time chiefly in London," said Mr. Langton. "Did your

new acquaintance form any conjecture as to what his present pursuits and employments might be?"

"I rather believe his chief occupation is supposed to be picking up Lady Carew's pocket-handkerchief; and he is said to be always at his post, doing his duty with exemplary regularity."

"Oh, that's it! He is just the age to think it a high honor! I suppose he got the situation in Florence."

"I conclude he must have applied for it there at least; but if Burgess is good authority upon Anglo-Tuscan gossip, the 'situation,' as you call it, was occupied in Florence, latterly at least, by a man a good deal older than Fred Desborough—not the Frenchman I had heard of before, but an Englishman, who was moreover engaged to that niece of Lady Bradford's, Miss Kerr, whom you may remember—a pretty girl rather—with a very good fortune. She had not been used to have her claims disregarded; couldn't understand that her intended should be always more ready to go here and there with Lady Carew than with herself; and finally broke off her marriage 'on account,' as her aunt told everyone, 'of the gentleman's complete devotion in another quarter.' A desperate feud was the consequence; the man called himself ill-used, the young lady's friends justified her at Lady Carew's expense, and as they are both well connected and well known, I imagine they got the victory in the strife of tongues; that is, got a large party of their acquaintance to say, both here and

abroad, that her ladyship ought not to be visited. How far this decree of the Bradford and Kerr faction has been, or will be carried out, I can't tell you, nor whether the false suitor has attended the object of his admiration to England; but I rather think not."

As this story was drawing to a close, Mr. Langton, whose curiosity, so far as it went, was now satisfied, remembered that he had to read over Oswald's paper, and probably to write a business letter to his attorney before the post went out; and it followed that upon its conclusion he rose from the garden seat, saying, "he must leave pleasant idleness, and retire for awhile to his study." But Markham, who had—as it seemed sympathetically—risen also, seated himself again after his host had moved away, saying, without any trace of the slightly sarcastic tone in which he had retailed Mr. Burgess' anecdotes:

"I am sorry for this entanglement of young Desborough's; and should be still more sorry for the whole matter, if I were not convinced that when Kate is once married to a man like Oswald, he will know how to put a stop to so undesirable an intimacy as hers has been with that woman. Friendships with such people are sure, in the long run, to lead to mischief in one way or other, though *she* has had too much sense and right feeling to be injured by the thing as yet. But," continued he, after a pause, which his companion began to think awkward, yet did not like to break

by any general remark, "I have never said yet that in coming here I met Oswald (as usual, on his way to the station), and heard from him, on inquiring how his affairs progressed, that, though the day is not exactly named, all preparatory business is being done as fast as it can; which is what no one appeared to be dreaming of when I called at Wyngate three weeks back. So I suppose, after the many vexatious delays I have heard complained of, I ought to congratulate you on things being so speedily concluded; and yet, somehow, for all I am sure you experience as unalloyed pleasure as a brother's marriage can give to such a sister as you have been to Oswald, I can only bring myself to wish you 'as much joy as you can feel on the occasion.'"

"I don't wonder at your qualification," replied she, with a somewhat melancholy smile; "but, do you know, my pleasure is more unalloyed than you would perhaps suppose; for it is not as if Oswald had left me to be married four or five years ago; I believe I should *then* have hardly been able to bear congratulations on what would have been so great and sudden a loss. But since it has been so visible that his life here no longer suited him, he has lived so much from home, and at the same time there seemed so many difficulties in the way of a suitable marriage for one who had neither wealth nor profession, that I have been more anxious than I can describe lest he should never be favoured with such a fortunate chance as

has, to my exceeding relief, now befallen him; and I think I may say that my satisfaction *is* unalloyed."

"You are most unselfish!" exclaimed Markham.

"Why, I have told you how it is; and I have been saying to myself so long 'that I would give *anything* to see Oswald married to a woman worthy of him,' that I should fear I was very unthankful if I let my mind rest on what loss there may be for me! I have not lived to be so old as I am, without learning that one need never expect any great good to happen, without having to pay some little tax for it."

"You consider yourself old, Miss Langton?" asked he, with a slight smile. "Please to remember that I am three years older, if not four, seeing that I have the advantage of Oswald, who is your elder brother."

"I was twenty-nine on my last birth-day," said she, "which is young or old, according to the company one is in; but I believe I *feel* older than some people of the same standing, from having had, for years past, to act more for myself than most single women of my age; I shall have to do that to a greater extent even, when Oswald has a home of his own."

The last words were spoken with an involuntary accent of sadness, which struck her hearer.

"It will indeed be so," said he; "and you are not fond enough of power to be comforted for seeing less of your dearest friend, by the

probability of having more complete influence, bearing more decided rule in this house. I am very sorry for you."

There seemed something abrupt, rather flatly abrupt, too, in this conclusion; but the tone of it was so earnest, the feeling seemed so friendly, that Cecilia could not but answer:

"It is most kind in you . . . ."

"Not so very—not so very. It is easy to feel for and with those who are suffering, indirectly, by what one has suffered from one's self. Kate Desborough's liking your brother better than me spoilt a day-dream of mine last summer; and is like, in a good measure, to deprive you of the companionship you are fondest of. If women were not so abominably romantic as they all are, when not of the kind that sells itself to the best bidder, there might be a remedy for that, as for some other evils in creation."

"Romantic! you don't think me that, Mr. Markham, for a *little* regretting the rides I have been used to have with Oswald when he is in England!"

"Romantic for *that!*—no. I call that a piece of downright natural affection, that you would have just the same if you had never heard of what it is interesting and dignified to feel! No, it's not on *that* point I should dream of thinking you romantic."

"On what then?"

"Well, I'm not absolutely sure that you are so;

but I call it romantic, when a woman would sooner die than help a man, who has been her friend all his life, to get on rather more good-humoredly through the world than he could do by himself, mainly because she knows he was in love with a friend of hers awhile back. That is what I mean by romantic; and it is the absence of that over-strained feeling which I think would be desirable for the remedying of some evils—when people are friends, and good friends, I mean. Are you romantic, Cecilia?"

"Hardly so," she answered hesitatingly, and not at once taking in the bearing of what had been said; "but," added she, as his whole meaning flashed on her, "if I am not romantic, still I may be surprised, may be scarce able to . . ."

"To give an answer in half a minute? No—I daresay not; but I'm going to join your father in his study; I shall sit with him for awhile; and when I meet you here again, on leaving him, you will—perhaps—be able to tell me if you are unromantic enough to take up a different kind of responsibility to that which your brother's marriage would in itself throw on you."

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